SVARNALATA

SCENES
FROM HINDU VILLAGE LIFE IN BENGAL

BY

N. GANGULI

TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI BY

DAKSHINACHARAN ROY



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TO

SIR ASUTOSH MUKHOPADHYAYA, SARASVATI, KT.

C.S.I., M.A., D.L., D.SC., F.R.A.S., F.R.S.E., ETC.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED AS A TOKEN OF
THE WRITER'S DEEP AND SINCERE
REGARD

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own pleasure or amusement, and was so unwilling to learn that he had always to be dragged to his lessons Kind words had no effect on him, and harsh treatment, far from doing any good, only seemed to make him sink deeper in the way he ought not to go When at last he gave up going to school, he was a great dunce, scarcely fit for anything in the world But in Bidhu's time lack of education was no obstacle to the marriage of a high class Brahmin, and so it came about that he was married in his fifteenth year, thus following the example of his brother who had already taken a wife With his marriage Bidhu bade adieu to learning

Bidhu's mother lived five years after this, and during that period nothing worthy of note happened except that the brothers had children born to them To Sasibhushan a son and a daughter were born, and to Bidhubhushan a son.

CHAPTER II.

A TRAVELLING PEDLAR

We now come to a time four or five years after the death of the mother of Sasi and Bidhu. The children of the two brothers had grown well, and their ages varied from five to seven years. They now ran about and chased one another and played games Sometimes they walked with their servant to the bazaar, and occasionally they quarrelled with other children.

So long as their mother was alive, the brothers were knit together by love and kindness Bidhu knew not envy, and his elder brother was very gentle in his conduct towards him After the death of their mother, however, Sasibhushan's wife endeavoured to make her husband understand that considerations of economy rendered it inadvisable for him and his brother to carry on a joint household. But Sasibhushan, it seemed, was not one to make a change hastily Were they not born of the same parents? Were they not nursed and suckled by the same mother? They might quarrel and even separate, but nothing could extinguish their natural affection for each other. The case, with their wives, however, was different They had no sisterly love for each other, and often quarrelled. Added to this

there was a great contrast between them While the one was gentle and submissive, the other was rude and insolent While the one wanted to avoid scenes, the other wanted to create them The brothers, however, held aloof from their wives' quarrels, and hence, up to this time, they were on perfectly good terms with each other.

While things thus went on with the brothers, there arrived one afternoon in their neighbourhood a pedlar, with his old-fashioned trunk, made of canework, full of fine things for sale In those days a pedlar's visit was greatly welcomed by all the young people in a village, for it was not often he came to them, and when he did come it was only to make a short stay, and then to be off again Now, the sight of a variety of fine things, such as looking-glasses, combs, ear-rings, whistles, dolls, marbles, and so forth, exposed for sale on a large broad piece of cloth, reminding one of a fancy shop, brought the children, and the young as well as the elderly ladies, together Purchasers were not wanting among them, although some thought the prices too high, and withdrew one after another The children of course wanted toys, and those who got them jumped about for joy There were others crying because they did not get what they wanted. Pramada, Sasibhushan's wife, bought whistles for her son and daughter She did not buy one, however, for Bidhu's son Sarala, the wife of Bidhu, was also there, but, happening not to have a single pice with her, turned to go home When half way back her son met her He had seen her in the distance, and came running up to her

"What have they got there, ma?" inquired Gopal "Let us go and see."

"We must not go there, my child," said Sarala. "They are quarrelling there; they will beat us, if we go near them"

"Why do they quarrel, ma? Who will beat us?" innocently asked the child

"Come, love, we must not stand here," said Sarala "Let us go home as quickly as we can"

"I won't go home with you," said the child in a rather decided tone.

Sarala was in a fix Pramada saw it all, and enjoyed the trouble her sister-in-law was in

"What do you do here?" said Pramada to her children "Go you, Bepin, and show your whistle to Gopal. Go you too, Kamini"

The children went off at their mother's bidding They quickly joined Gopal, whistling and jumping merrily

"Let me have a whistle, ma," said the boy, crying, seeing that his cousins had got whistles

"The man, my dear," said Sarala, "hasn't got any more to-day. I will buy you one when he comes again to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said the boy. "No, I will have one to-day"

Gopal was persistent, and cried very much What was his mother to do? Poor woman! She was compelled to go back with her son

As they drew near, Gopal ran and got a whistle from the man, and then re-joined his cousins

Sarala had not a single pice, and yet the whistle must be paid for. She was most unhappy and looked wretchedly about her, at last fixing her eyes on Pramada "Will you lend me a pice?" she said to her.

At other times Pramada was quick enough to hear,

but now, strangely enough, she seemed deaf. Sarala repeated her request, but still Pramada pretended not to hear her. She ventured to address her sister-in-law a third time, and again failed to attract her notice.

"Can't you hear your sister-in-law?" cried one to Pramada. "Why don't you answer her?"

It was no use pretending not to hear any longer. She turned reluctantly to her sister-in-law, and winking and eyeing her as if she had just got out of bed, said, "What?"

"Will you lend me a pice?" said Sarala again.

"Lend you a pice?" said Pramada. "Why, I am no money-lender."

"Then will you pay for that whistle, please?" said Sarala. "I haven't so much as a cowry with me."

"I cannot attend to everybody's wants," said Pramada. "Surely I am not expected to give away all that I am worth in charity?"

"My boy should be the object of your love and affection, not of your charity," said Sarala rather bitterly. "Gopal is as much your own as Bepin and Kamini. He is your own if you but choose to think him your own."

"Thinking will not do," said Pramada. "It is no use my pretending to be what I am not. It won't do to think myself a queen. I know I am a miserable wretched creature, and it is no good trying to shut my eyes to the fact."

Sarala was struck dumb by her sister-in-law's line of argument.

"There are strange characters in the world," Pramada went on saying to herself. "There is no pleasing them. I hate persons that are hard to please. I cannot bear

the sight of them My husband and I have a good income, and were it not that we have to work and slave to feed the drones we should be able to put by considerable savings But I know my husband is a great fool If he had been guided by me, he would by now have been a rich man"

Pramada would have said more, but the thought of her husband being such a fool as he seemed to her was enough to make her cry Indeed she wept like a girl to think that her husband was so weak.

There were some matronly ladies, whose selfish motives had led them to become admirers of Pramada They often had to go to her for such things as salt, mustard-oil, and other household necessities, and on every such occasion they did not fail to make flattering remarks about her personal attractions and disposition According to them she was sweet-tempered, young and handsome, had beautiful eyes and a well-shaped nose, and indeed was perfection itself: When these, therefore, found Pramada in tears, they affected deep concern at her grief. One of them could not help crying at the trouble of her young friend And there were two who did not fail to blame Sarala There was one widow, a rather fat lady of short stature, who was particularly pungent in her remarks She said that Sarala had no right to speak insolently to her sister-in-law, who was sweetness itself for she must remember that her husband did not earn a pice, and was entirely dependent on his elder brother.

The remarks made by this last speaker, whose name was Digambari, had, it seemed, the greatest weight, for all the elderly ladies present there at once took the cue, and, endorsing her opinion, joined her in blaming

Sarala. Beginning with Sarala, they went on to criticise the character of every young woman in the village, and the conclusion they came to was that in the present age there was not a single girl of good character with the exception, of course, of Pramada

Poor Sarala! she stood in the midst of her blustering critics—a picture of utter helplessness. She did not dare to raise her eyes which were glistening with tears But when, however, the pedlar had got his wares together and was ready to leave, Sarala was quite at a loss to know what to do, and was much distressed She would have liked to have returned the whistle if her boy had been by As it happened, the man was going away without getting his money when Digambari, the fat lady, of whom we have made mention, cried, "Hallo, man! you have forgotten the price of that whistle" The man turned as he heard her, and stopped Thank you, madam," he said, "I don't want the money It is a trifle I can well spare a whistle for a boy"

This answer, however, did not give Sarala pleasure She felt rather humiliated The good fellow, perceiving that her pride was wounded, said that as he wished to make a day or two's stay in the village, she could pay him when it pleased her Sarala liked him for this answer, and secretly blessed the man, for she thought he had a heart When he had taken his leave, Pramada was sorry, and her satellites, the elderly ladies, looked disappointed

CHAPTER III

GOPAL AND HIS MOTHER

SLOWLY and pensively did Sarala wend her way homeward She felt so miserable On getting home, she attended to her household work as usual Then she retired to her room to brood over the event of the afternoon Sarala truly loved her husband, but she was rather troubled in mind whenever she reflected upon the sort of idle thoughtless life he led. Bidhubhushan liked to stay away all day, and did not come home except to eat his meals His time was spent in singing and playing at cards and dice However, he had great regard for his elder brother. His education had been neglected, and he might have been a very different man if he had been willing to learn when a boy. His chief fault was that he was sometimes badly out of temper; yet it must be said that he was not easily moved to anger; but once his passion was aroused it was not easily cooled.

Poor Sarala! she felt more miserable this afternoon than she had ever done before Should she tell all that had passed, to her husband? She knew that it was no use Yet she wanted to tell him all to relieve her mind. She hardly knew what to do, when her boy came and

stood before her. Tears were in her eyes, but she wiped them away quickly, for she did not want to be caught weeping by her boy

"You are weeping, mamma?" cried Gopal He was rather surprised, for he had never found his mother in tears before

"No, I am not, my love," said Sarala rather hoarsely

"Oh! you are, mamma There is a tear in your eye," exclaimed Gopal in a tone which was sufficiently expressive of pain

And a tear did start now to her eyes for she was deeply moved by the childish words of her innocent darling

"Oh, I am not feeling very well, I am in pain," said Sarala, trying to disguise her feelings

"Then why don't you try the drug Syama gives me when I am ill?" said Gopal with a look of childish concern, "I will go and call her here."

"No, no, you need not go, my dear," she said

But this excuse having failed, she pretended to be troubled with a mote in her eye, which caused it to water

"Then let me blow into your eye, mamma, it will do you good," said Gopal, drawing close to his mother

"It is no use, my own dear, I shall be better presently" said Sarala, smiling through her tears and taking him affectionately in her arms.

Sarala hung over her son and gazed on her little darling's face with feelings of mingled love and sorrow Tears glistened in her eyes. Gopal knew not why his mother wept, but such is the influence of love that when he but saw his mother weep, his infant heart was touched, and a tear stood in his eye This distressed his mother's heart She wanted to forget her own sorrow, and walk-

ing out of the room paced up and down with her precious burden on her breast Gopal put his head on his mother's shoulder and kept quite still Sarala tried to divert his attention She said funny things and laughed herself and tried to make him laugh

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN CHANDRAHAR[1]

CHILDREN are apt to imitate the faults of their parents, but they seldom imitate their good qualities A worthy father does not always have a worthy son, but a bad father is quite likely to have a bad son

Pramada's father was named Ramdev Chakravarti This gentleman lived a mile away from Sasibhushan's house Envy, malice and a disposition to quarrel were the chief characteristics of his family A daughter of his, after her marriage, was sure to sow the seed of dissension in the family of her husband. Pramada had the faults of her parents Her father was a frank and open-hearted man, but of this or of any good feature of his character she had none After her marriage she learned to care more for money than for anything else in the world As soon as her mother-in-law had died, and she was, properly speaking, the mistress of the house, she became a haughty, wicked and malicious woman, who took a great pleasure in wounding the feelings of her sister-in-law

As we have already observed, Bidhubhushan had no useful employment on which to engage his mind, and he led a sort of idle life, for which Pramada made

[1] An ornament for the waist.

his wife pay dearly by making her work all day. Though Sarala worked continually, she never uttered a word of complaint In addition to regularly doing the cooking, she had to be busy the whole day, seeing to this, that, and the other thing "I wouldn't mind working twice as hard if my health permitted it," Pramada would say to anyone who might venture to remark by way of intercession that her sister-in-law had scarcely a moment's rest in the family She complained of her "wretched health," as she called it, and not infrequently hinted that a little bodily exertion was sure to aggravate her complaint, though what her complaint was nobody ever heard or knew However, as she was never known to take any medicine or to abstain, even for half a day, from her usual food, and besides as there did not seem to be symptoms of any disease whatever, and as she never felt the least inconvenience, but, on the contrary, seemed to keep excellent health, it was difficult to know what her complaint could be Yet it must be said that her complaint, whatever it was, did inconvenience her at times, but it was only when her meal was not ready, and she had to wait beyond the usual hour.

Now after the scene described in the preceding pages, Pramada went home with a look that made it clear to all who came in her way that she meant some mischief. Entering her room she shut the door with a bang, bolted it, and then went and lay down on the bed. The women, who were then in the house, significantly eyed each other, as much as to say, "Something unpleasant is going to happen"

Pramada had such a way of answering people that no one relished the idea of asking her anything

Just now Bepin returned from school. He walked up to his mother's room, but, finding the door shut, was off again to play Kamini, however, wanted to go to her mother She stood crying at the door Poor child! Her mother was not going to open it for her, though she might stand there and cry her eyes out

The servants in a family, as a rule, have always the greatest regard for the master or mistress, whose favour they want to gain The case, however, in Sasibhushan's house was different Syama had a greater regard for Sarala than she had for her mistress Indeed she loved her, and felt deeply for her Sarala had as much sympathy for Syama, and her chief satisfaction was to talk to her The reason being that they were both treated with unkindness, and having equal griefs they learned to sympathise with each other, and thus arose a friendship between them Syama could not hear her mistress speak an unkind word to Sarala without feeling as though she would burst into tears One thing we must not omit to mention about her. Syama was fond of prying into the secrets of others Even in broad daylight she would go listening at doors, and she would tell Sarala all that she might thus stealthily pick up They had no secrets from each other

Sarala gave Syama the details of the event of the afternoon When she had heard all, she said with a smile, "It is all for a new ornament, I can tell you"

The sun was about to set Knowing it was near time for her master to come home, Syama kept in readiness his slippers, his towel and a bowl of water, as usual. All this time Sarala had many misgivings in her heart. Pramada still lay in bed, weeping and sobbing aloud Tears fell plentifully from her eyes Bepin had returned

from playing, and Kamini was again crying to go to her mother While things stood thus, Sasibhushan returned home, tired after a hard day's work

Without stopping he stepped up to his room as usual, but finding the door shut, he began to knock at it. After knocking about a minute in vain, he loudly inquired, "Who is there in the room?" There was no answer He then turned to the maidservant and said, "Where is your mistress, Syama?"

"In there," said Syama, as she caught up a pitcher, pretending that she was going to fetch water from the pond

"Will you open the door or do you mean to keep me standing here?" cried Sasibhushan, in a tone which plainly showed that he did not mean to be disobeyed

Pramada certainly did not intend to go further than was prudent She did not mean to offend her husband by overacting her part Getting slowly on her legs, and assuming a look of profound grief, she opened the door, and then returned and lay down on the bed again. Her eyes were red with weeping Sasibhushan quickly guessed by her looks what was the matter, for such conduct on Pramada's part was not unusual She was peevish at times, and especially when it suited her to be so She was fretful when she wanted, for instance, a costly *saree*[1] or an ornament of the newest fashion. Her husband always sought to please her by letting her have what she wanted.

Sasibhushan went to his wife, and, bending over her and smiling, said, "What again?"

She made no answer "What's the matter now?" he said

[1] A piece of cloth with broad coloured borders.

Silence still. He might as well have talked to the wall. He inquired a third time, but to no purpose "The matter, it seems, is not a trifling one," he said to himself He stepped to the door, and putting his head out, cried, "Syama, Syama"

No Syama could be seen, and Sasibhushan at last lost his patience and exclaimed, "What! will no one answer, and am I to be thus served in my own house?"

Pramada felt she must speak now. "What can you want with a poor wretched creature like myself?" she said in a tone that made her truly seem to act her part in a tragedy

"Are you deaf? Couldn't you hear me?" he said, rather angrily

Pramada was offended. "What is it to you," she said, 'whether I am deaf or not deaf? If you don't want me here, tell me so, and I will leave your house at once."

Sasibhushan had come home to rest after a hard day's work. He was now in no mood to put up with his wife's fretfulness When, therefore, he heard her talk in that fashion, he could not but be angry and said, "You often talk of leaving my house; why don't you do so?"

"Why, do you mean to say," she said, "that my father is not able to support me?"

Pramada insinuated that her father was not unable to provide for her, although the fact was that he was extremely poor He lived, as we have said, only a mile away, which enabled his daughter to see to his wants. Pramada privately supplied her father with rice, pulse, and other food, from her own store-room This, however, was not unknown to Sasibhushan, though out of

regard to his wife's sentiments, he connived at it. Now when his wife rather artfully hinted that her father was not too poor to support her, he was much amused and said, laughing, "Go and live with your father, my dear, if you like, but mind he must no longer expect to receive any help from this quarter."

This remark, although it was made in quite a facetious manner, and apparently without any intention to give offence, failed not to affect her most. A woman is quick to take to heart any insinuations against her father or any member of his family. Pramada took the remark, jestingly made by her husband, as a bitter sarcasm, and it so distressed and mortified her that she burst into tears afresh She wept as though her heart would break Sasibhushan now regretted his indiscretion He certainly wished to tell her he was very sorry, and sit down by her side and try to comfort her, but as he felt that would only be adding fuel to the flame of her grief, he left the room in the hope that she would be herself again when left alone for an hour or so. Not being able, however, to stay out long, he returned in a few minutes, and sitting quite close to her, said, "I am so sorry, my dear Won't you forgive and forget?"

Pramada only hung her head in silence.

Sasibhushan wanted to make her speak, and knowing what would act as a charm in producing the desired effect, said, "I have this day given orders for your *chandrahar*. You have often asked for it and now I think it will be ready in a few days. Of course I expected to have particular attentions paid to me to-day; but I ought not to wonder at the sort of treatment I have received. It is just, I believe, as ill-luck would have it"

After a little pause Sasibhushan said again, "Bidhu told me one day there was no need for me to hurry with my present, and that I would do well to have the new sitting-room finished first. I said, 'I am not going to leave it unfinished, you may depend on that' "

Pramada could no longer maintain her silence The mention of the gold ornament, not to say her anger at Bidhu's being opposed to her husband giving orders for it, was inducement enough for her to speak

"I am quite sick and tired of them," she said at last "They are such a trouble to me "

"Who are a trouble to you ?" asked Sasibhushan

"What a question !" said Pramada

"How can I understand you, unless you speak plainly. You said 'they' Of course you didn't mean my brother alone Who else is a trouble to you ?"

"Who can it be but your precious sister-in-law ? Every chance she can get to expose and insult me she takes. As for your dear brother, why, he is full of conceit, and he has the audacity to call you a fool among his friends who are worthless as himself My having an ornament will be the death of him He cannot bear any good thing happening to you And you call this brother of yours simple-minded A very good simple-minded young man indeed, to call his own elder brother a fool—a brother to whom he ought to be grateful for his fatherly care of himself and his family !"

"Well, after all I should think Bidhu is a good fellow at bottom "

"I felt sure you would say that You are quite ignorant of the ways of the world However, I think you should be undeceived about your brother. You think he is simple-minded and well-meaning. No, he

is not. He is full of cunning, and you are too good for the world—too simple to understand his artful ways. Why does he want to have the sitting-room finished first? You will say, for the sake of your own comfort and convenience. Not at all. To be plain with you, it is because he has a special interest in it; because, living jointly with you, he is entitled to a share in it. He thinks of that. I can see it well enough, though *you* do not."

Pramada had an indirect way of calling her husband a fool, not perhaps without reason. Sasibhushan had little or nothing of the shrewdness of his wife. He only understood accounts and screwing money from the ryots. Now, however, he thought that his wife was right. " see now," said he to himself, "why he wanted to have the room finished first. 'Giving one's wife ornaments is throwing away money,' says he. My wife's eye quite sees through his garb of simplicity."

"You are quite right, my love," said he to her, as though he could hardly keep his own thoughts to himself. "If I had known my brother's heart before, I would surely have rejected his proposal of having the new room."

"You never asked my advice about it," said Pramada, now glad to find that her words had the desired effect on her husband. "A man may be illiterate, and yet have a good heart. But it won't do to think your brother what he is not. He looks as meek as a lamb, but he is a wily fox, I can tell you."

"Hang the room, I will stop the building work and have done with it. Now about your sister-in-law."

"She is a precious woman, so sweet and gentle! Why [illegible] not find such another within twenty miles [illegible]. She talks big, she hates me, and she

cares not a straw for you. This evening she picked a quarrel with me"

"What was the matter?"

"This evening a man came in our neighbourhood with toys and other fine things to sell Bepin and Kamini wanted to have whistles I happened not to have a single pice with me Our good neighbour, Digambari, however, kindly lent me a couple of pice to buy whistles for my children My sister-in-law also wanted to buy a whistle for her boy She went and got one from the man But as she had no money with her, she turned to me and said, 'Will you lend me a pice? I will pay it back with interest' I said, 'You talk of interest to *me*! But I really do not know what interest may be charged on a pice' Upon this, she said 'You practise usury, you ought to know' I said nothing, and she gave vent to her spleen in such a torrent of words that I only looked on with astonishment"

"Well, I should like to hear the words she used to you"

"I do not recollect them I am a plain sort of person, and do not much care to recall such things Our friend, Digambari, however, may remember all, for she was present on the spot Shall I send for her to-morrow?"

"O yes, I should like to hear everything from her"

"I am about to ask you something," said Pramada, "you must tell me the honest truth"

"What is it, my dear?" said Sasibhushan

"Have you truly given orders for my new ornament?" she said, smiling

"Truly speaking, I haven't yet But to-morrow I will see to it To-morrow morning I will send for the goldsmith and give him an order for it I shall

think no more of the sitting-room. What a true friend I have in my brother!"

Pramada said nothing. She sat with downcast eye, evidently a little disappointed, and thinking of her promised gift

But where had Syama been all this time? With her ear applied to the door she had been listening attentively to the conversation of the husband and wife, and she did not miss a word She then went, as usual, to Sarala and told her all she had overheard When Syama had finished, she said, "Didn't I guess aright what her fretfulness meant?"

"Yes, a new ornament," said Sarala, smiling

CHAPTER V.

SARALA'S DISQUIETUDE

BIDHU did not come home on the night of Sasibhushan's conversation with his wife There was a *jattra*[1] at a neighbour's house, and there he stayed the whole night A wife is all dependence on her husband, and Sarala very much wanted to see her lord to whom she had so much to say After waiting until it was very late, and her husband not returning, she rose to go to bed She, however, could not get any sleep She sat up in bed and thought that if she continued in that posture for some minutes, she might be inclined to sleep, but still slumber came not to her She was very impatient now, and determined to send Syama to fetch her husband home So she went and roused the maid-servant "Syama, dear," she said in a coaxing tone, "will you go and bring your master home?"

"I can't go now, I don't know where to look for him," said Syama, yawning and rubbing her eyes

"He is gone to the *jattra* I recollect now he told me he would go to it"

"I cannot go among the crowd, I tell you that plainly," said Syama, evidently annoyed at her being disturbed in her rest

[1] A play performed without the aid of a stage and scenes

"You make a lame excuse, Syama Have you never gone among a crowd before?"—"Well, what if I have? But I mustn't say anything" With this Syama bustled out of the house

As soon as Syama had gone, Sarala felt much relieved. She sat up for a time waiting and watching, and then, tired, laid her down to rest It was no longer night, and the fresh soft breezes of the morning made her inclined to sleep

Syama soon reached the house where the entertainment was going on, walked in and looked searchingly among the swarming crowds around, but her eyes failed to detect Bidhu Loud cheers were given every now and then, and Syama unconsciously sat down to listen to the play Her notice, however, was suddenly attracted to one who played on the *dhole*[1] Syama saw it was her master at a glance, but she wondered what could have induced him thus to assist at the entertainment She watched him for a time, but her eyes never met his, so she directed her attention again to the play and was soon deep in it

Sarala was asleep How sweet is sleep! It makes us forget our cares and troubles Sickness and sorrow, humiliation and disappointment, a hundred little things that chafe us in our daily domestic concerns in life, and distresses such as make life seem a burden—these are all forgotten in sleep. But there are times when a wretched man seems to have no peace even in sleep. Troublesome dreams disturb him at night. Sleeping or waking, he seems incapable of rest.

Sarala was sleeping Nestling at her breast was her darling, in slumber. At her head and close by the

[1] A kind of drum played on with the fingers

window a lamp burned dimly. Her face was distinctly visible except when the light flickered It was a pretty face, and it now looked charming as the light shone fitfully upon it. Her lip quivered a little She looked pensive in sleep

The sun looked in at the window of Sarala's room. She awoke as its golden rays kissed her eyes Getting up with a start she left the room, leading her boy by the hand

CHAPTER VI.

GRANNY DIGAMBARI

THE reader must remember his old aquaintance, Digambari, of whom we have had occasion to speak before We shall now try to give a somewhat more detailed account of her. This lady lived within a stone's throw of Sasibhushan's house. She owned two huts, one used as a bed-room, and the other as a kitchen. The enclosed space or yard in front of her dwelling was very small, and at the back of it was a plot of ground with a few flowers, a cocoa palm, and one or two other fruit trees in it, which she called her garden The house was kept scrupulously clean, and Digambari lived in it all by herself.

It will be rather difficult to describe her person and character Let us briefly notice her complexion The things most readily suggested by the look of her skin are ink, the soot of the kitchen, tar and the like She was a short, stout woman, with only a few tufts of hair left here and there on her head, large teeth such as would remind one of radishes, red eyes, and feet unusually broad and long, the toes standing considerably apart, as though they had quarrelled and separated. Digambari was the pet of her father, and

went with him wherever he went till she was eleven or twelve years of age. She was known to every one in the village She was about forty, and the young people of the neighbourhood called her granny, and loved to cut jokes with her She lost her husband shortly after her marriage, so that she had but a short experience of wifehood When she became a widow, she went to her father-in-law's, but left it for good after three or four days' stay, during which she did nothing but quarrel. Though a rather bold and meddlesome woman, and the dread of all the girls in the village, she was outwardly obliging, could speak flattering words on occasion, and gave a friendly reception to any one who went to see her at her house

Just as Sarala left her room in the morning, as seen in the preceding chapter, she shrank back at the sight of Digambari and hastily went in again to avoid her Digambari walked towards Pramada's quarters with her face turned away. Sarala came out presently and saw her enter Pramada's room A wall separated the rooms of the two sisters-in-law Sarala re-entered her chamber and tried to overhear the conversation that followed, but, not being able to hear anything, she left the room and went to engage herself in her domestic work

Digambari talked with Pramada for about an hour, and then went and called to Sarala

Sarala's mind misgave her She slowly approached the place where Digambari was standing

"I am so sorry," Digambari began at once, as she fixed her naturally red eyes on Sarala, "I am about to tell you something that will grieve your heart I have been requested to tell it to you, don't blame me"

She made many excuses, pretending she was very

sorry on her account. She assured her she wished to be the last person to have anything to do with this business, but that she could not possibly avoid it.

Her introductory speech, such as it was, greatly frightened Sarala, and she said, "Tell me at once what is the matter and don't keep me in suspense, please"

Digambari, looking as if she did not like the business at all, said, "I have been requested by your sister-in-law to tell you that you and she must separate from to-day. 'We have not pulled well together,' said she, 'and never will, under the circumstances there is nothing better we can do than to separate There will be no more quarrels and discontent and dissatisfaction, and you know there is nothing I dislike so much as an unhappy house' These are the very words she wished me to say to you."

This was distressing to Sarala. "What will my husband think of me when he knows it?" thought Sarala to herself "Perhaps he will think I have not been behaving as I ought." This thought she could not bear She could put up with insults and unkindness, as she had often done, without a murmur, but she could not stand the thought of her husband thinking ill of her What she heard was a torment to her Nothing had she dreaded in her imagination so much as this She had trembled even at the very thought of it Was she not all submission to her sister-in-law? Was it not her constant endeavour to please her in every possible way she could? Did she not work continually without ever looking to her own comfort? Did she not know that it was her interest to keep in with her? She had always taken care so to conduct herself as to give her cruel and malicious sister-in-law no reason whatever

to find fault with her. Yet in spite of all this she was to be discarded, hers, it seemed, was the lot to suffer.

"Does my brother-in-law mean it?" asked Sarala in a piteous tone She felt as though her feelings would choke her.

"Your brother-in-law is a quiet peaceful man," said Digambari. "He said to me that he thought it would be far better to separate than have constant quarrels in the family"

"Oh! what shall I do!" said Sarala in great distress "Will you not plead for us, my dear madam? We shall be utterly helpless without him, and you know it"

"I am very sorry I can do nothing for you, my friend," said Digambari "Your brother-in-law said to me just now, 'My dear madam, you know, my wife is an invalid Would you kindly look after our meals? You know of course that we shall be put to great inconvenience if you will not oblige us by complying with my request' Of course I cannot refuse them this favour I like to serve people, and I am always ready to do my best for my neighbours"

Having delivered her message, Digambari moved towards the kitchen, and Sarala, now feeling that she was a truly forlorn creature, was obliged to seek her own room.

Shortly afterwards Sasibhushan started for the *cutchery*[1] On leaving he told Digambari that his sister-in-law might make use of the cowshed for preparing their meals, adding that he should try to find a better place for them the next day

Now let us turn to Bidhubhushan On the preceding day, after taking his meal, he left the house again, as usual On returning to his friends he heard that the

[1] A zamindar's office

Mukerjees of their neighbourhood were going to have a *jattra* at their house The news was hailed by him with delight He loved music, and was fond of such performances and other similar amusements He went to present himself at their house. On getting there he hastened to assist in making the necessary preparations In a few minutes he was properly busy, and bustled about, now doing this, now doing that, sometimes he seriously consulted a friend, and at other times eagerly whispered something in one's ear, all the while seeming to have a most lively interest in his work

The sun was about to go down, and Bidhu was full of glee When it had quite turned to dusk, he left off and went home to have his supper Supper was not ready, but he could not stop to wait for it. Much as his wife wanted him, he seemed in a tearing hurry and went off again, saying to her only. "I am not going to wait for supper, I am going to the *jattra* "

On his return, however, Bidhu was painfully surprised to hear that the players had proposed to put off the play till the next night because one of the most important hands among them, the one who played on the *dhole*, had been attacked with cholera. All preparations had been made The play could not conveniently be put off, yet it seemed that there was no other alternative. While things thus stood, Bidhu offered voluntarily to supply the place of the *dholeman*, and his proposal was met with joy all round

The play commenced at the fixed time. The players, however, had their fears about Bidhu, lest his bad performance should mar the effect of the play and shame them After two or three songs, however, they became

impressed with such a high opinion of him that they discarded all fear as utterly baseless, and felt greatly encouraged Every one was pleased with the performance, and the gain of the players, in kind and coin, was much greater than they had expected

After the play was over, the actors offered Bidhu a portion of what they had earned, but he generously refused to accept it

As Bidhu was going home, he overtook Syama on the way Syama had sat out the play

"Where have you been, Syama ?"

"I have been to fetch you from the *jattra*," said Syama.

"Why didn't you see me then ?"

"There was such a thick press, and I was afraid to push my way through to go to you"

"Why, the men wouldn't eat you"

"What nonsense ! I didn't say they would"

Bidhu talked on pleasantly, and freely cut jokes till they neared home, when Syama suddenly turned away from his path and was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

SEPARATION OF THE BROTHERS.

SYAMA had been to call Bidhu, and she told him so, when he inquired, meeting her on the way, where she had been. Bidhu, however, thought that she was not serious. Indeed he thought that Syama had only been to hear the play.

Bidhu reached the door of his house, and walked in taking care not to make any noise. There was no one in the outer-house, and this struck him as rather strange. He walked into the inner parts, but he neither saw nor heard any one there. He went to look into the kitchen, thinking to find his wife there. But, finding Digambari, whom he had least expected to meet there, very busy in cooking, he was a little surprised and fell back a step or two, but being inclined to be facetious, he went and placing himself before her in a ludicrous posture said, "My sweet charmer, my owl of good luck, how very glad I am to meet you. To what good fortune do we owe this visit?"

Bidhu was accustomed to pay her such compliments, and Digambari always felt flattered and never took any offence.

Now, however, when Bidhu addressed her in such endearing terms, she looked very grave and said nothing.

"Why are you so cruel this morning, my dear madam? Why don't you say anything?"

Digambari was still silent and hung her head

Bidhu was in uncommonly good-humour this morning after his excellent performance in the play Standing before her with joined palms and an expression of mock submissiveness in his look, he said, "I am your most humble and obedient servant Do not torment me by persisting in your silence"

Digambari was still cold Neither his jokes nor anything he could say seemed likely to thaw her now This seemed strange to Bidhu, and he was puzzled what to make of it It struck him suddenly, however, that Syama had not really been joking, and he now began to suspect some mishap in the family He grew impatient, and went at once to find his wife. Sarala was in her room and weeping. She was miserable Sorrow and fear by turns oppressed her heart She was so afraid, when her husband knew all, he would blame her and scold her Quickly, however, Bidhu was before her He looked on her and was much frightened to find her in tears. A minute ago he was so jolly and jocose, but now he looked as though he greatly feared to ask any questions After some moments, however, he inquired, "Where is Gopal?"

"Gopal has gone to school," replied Sarala, sighing

"Bepin and Kamini?"

"Bepin also has gone to school Kamini may be about playing"

"What makes you weep then?" inquired Bidhu, considerably relieved

"Our brother-in-law is going to eat separately from to-day. He wants us to separate"

These words Sarala uttered in a tone of deep dejection

"My brother wants us to separate!" said Bidhu, in a tone which showed that he thought it as something simply impossible "I know my brother's heart, he is so very kind to me He cannot mean it, I am sure he cannot."

"He sent Granny Digambari to tell this to me," said Sarala "When he left for the office he told her again that we might prepare our meal in the cow-house for to-day, but that he would find a more suitable place next day for us"

"Well, what's the reason of his wanting to separate?" asked Bidhu with a look of perfect unconcern, as if he could hardly bring himself to believe such a thing to be possible

"I do not know; I asked my sister-in-law for the price of a whistle for Gopal," said Sarala. And she then told him all that had passed between her and her sister-in-law

Bidhu laughed at this and said, "It is a trifling matter My brother must be wholly ignorant of the truth, or he would not talk of separating However, it is easily mended Come, cheer up, love, don't be downhearted I am sure things will be all right again when he comes home"

"May heaven grant it!" said Sarala, feeling considerably relieved to find her husband so confident

"I want to bathe," said Bidhu "I sat up all night last night and feel so dull Bring me my towel, Sarala, and a little oil to put on my head"

Bidhu went off to bathe, and Sarala, now much relieved, went to proffer her assistance to Digambari Pramada, seeing her enter the kitchen, cried, "Syama,

a certain person has no business in our kitchen, you understand of course "

Syama was not there What did that matter? Pramada never spoke to the person with whom she was offended, but, if she wanted to say anything, addressed her remarks to Syama, whether Syama was present or not

Hurt by her sister-in-law's cutting remark, Sarala immediately left the kitchen and returned to her room in some confusion.

Shortly afterwards Syama came in, and finding Digambari very busy in cooking, she went to Sarala and said, laughing, "You have been released from your office?"

Syama always had a smile on her face and was ever jolly. When she put that question, laughing, Sarala was rather offended and gently reproved her, saying, "You are a silly girl not to know that it is not the time to laugh"

"Why," said Syama, "would you have me sit down and mope like an owl?" Perceiving, however a tear in Sarala's eye she felt rather ashamed

"O Syama,' said Sarala in a piteous tone, "my brother-in-law has made up his mind that we must separate, and we are going to be helpless" And she told her how she had found Digambari in the kitchen, and all that had been said by Sasibhushan

Syama was extremely sorry After a while, however, she said, laughing, "I really feel very thankful I am not my master's mother"

"Why, you silly girl?" asked Sarala, smiling

"Why, is not a mother to be very much pitied when her sons fall out and separate?"

Just as Syama said this, the children returned from school Gopal quickly appeared before his mother and said, "Let me have something to eat, mamma"

"Wait a little, my love," said Sarala, as she affectionately wiped the ink with which her boy had daubed his face Pramada put a sweetmeat into her boy's hand, and left the room as she said, "Now, eat here, mind you don't go out before you have finished" Bepin, however, would do no such thing As soon as his mother's back was turned, he left the room and went and called to Gopal

Gopal quickly joined his cousin, and seeing that he had got a sweetmeat to eat, said, "Will you let me have a bit, cousin?"

"No, mamma will scold me."

"Why should she scold you? when I have anything to eat I always share it with you. My mamma doesn't say anything"

"I can't give you any now, cousin, when I am a man I will"

"Why, I shall not always remain a child. When I am a man I shall not want anything from you"

Thus talking, the children came near to the kitchen Bepin looked round as if to see whether any one was watching, and then breaking off a small bit was going to give it to Gopal when Digambari, who was watching him from the kitchen, cried, "Stop, Bepin, I see you; I will tell your mother"

"Tell what? I haven't given him any of the sweetmeat," cried Bepin, as he crammed the whole of it into his little mouth

Gopal looked sad and disappointed He was just about to return to his mother when Syama, presently

coming up, put a sweetmeat into his hand. He looked very pleased Eating it he went and joined his cousin again

Bidhu quickly returned from his bath Shortly after, at the usual time, Sasibhushan returned home to have his meal Bidhu would not speak to him then, for he thought he was tired and needed rest Sasibhushan lay down for a while, then he took his bath, after which he sat down to his devotions He had just finished when Digambari announced that the meal had been served up He rose and went to dinner. His habit was to call his younger brother when about to dine That day for the first time he broke his usual custom He went to his meal alone and looked unusually grave Afterwards he took his nap as usual. As he sat reclining against a cushion, enjoying his *chillum* of tobacco and chewing betel, Bidhu entered and quietly went and sat down at his feet, holding his head down and looking sad For three or four minutes he sat expecting to be spoken to, then fairly tired of his brother's silence he asked, "Are you really determined that we must separate, brother?"

"Why, yes," said Sasibhushan, "it is better we should separate than have constant bickerings in the family"

"It is a pity there should be any bickerings at all, but whose fault is it? Had you not better inquire first and find out?"

"I have heard all, or I shouldn't want to separate"

"What have you heard, pray?"

"Why, yesterday a man came to sell toys; and my wife borrowed a couple of pice from Granny Digambari to buy whistles for the children My sister-in-law was standing by, and asked my wife, 'Will you lend me a

pice ? I will pay you interest ' Now, isn't it shameful to talk like that ? "

" Why, yes , but——"

" Don't interrupt me, you can have your say when I have done speaking Well, my wife replied, ' You talk of interest to me ! I really do not know what interest may be charged on a pice ' Upon that my sister-in-law said, ' Why, you practise usury, you ought to know ' What right has any one to talk like that, pray ? Is it for this that I ought to be kind ? "

He uttered his interrogations with such a sneer that Bidhu knew there was very little hope of reconciliation. Yet he said, " I tell you, what you have heard is not true " And he told him all exactly as he had heard it from Sarala

" This, I tell you, is true," he said rather emphatically

" Have you any witnesses to prove that it is true ? "

' Witnesses ! " exclaimed Bidhu " Why, I haven't come to court Yet I can call to witness one of the elderly women who were present "

" Granny Digambari was present Her evidence shows that your version is not true "

" Does it ? " said Bidhu in a rather sarcastic tone

' Well, if you don't believe me, you can call her here and ask She is in there "

" It is no use my asking her," said Bidhu after a brief pause Then rising and laughing scornfully he said again, " Such a respectable person ! Why, of course what you have heard is all true, since it comes from one whose veracity is not to be called in question "

Bidhu had moved up to the door, and was just about to leave the room when his brother called him back and said, " I will give you a room for your kitchen.

As to dividing between ourselves such movables and immovables as we possess, this should be done in the presence of our neighbours, and I should like to have it finished as early as possible to-morrow."

"Just as you please," said Bidhu "But why in the presence of our neighbours? I shall not dispute with you, you know that I shall be content to take what you may be pleased to give me."

When he had said this he left the room Pramada had been silent all the while, but just after her brother-in-law had left, she observed, "Such a haughty fellow! Didn't you mark his words? He would not stoop to conciliate his elder brother."

"Want will bring down his pride," said Sasibhushan, stretching himself out at full length and shutting his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

FORTUNE'S FROWNS

IT was the middle of December The hour was noon. One might have met just at this time a weary traveller resting under the shade of a tree, if one had happened to be on the road near Hanskhali, which led from Krishnagar to Calcutta Viewed at a distance the traveller looked about forty, but a closer inspection showed him to be ten or twelve years younger. On his head could be detected one or two solitary gray hairs He looked careworn and wretched It was easy to see that it was his troubles that made him look much older than his age He had on a pair of shoes patched in six or seven places, all dusty, the dust covering his legs up to the knees He wore a somewhat rough country *dhuti*[1] which did not look clean, a threadbare woollen shirt from which the nap was worn off, and over it to complete his suit, he wore a coarse sheet, which hung folded across his shoulder Close by his side lay his bamboo stick, and also his hookah and tobacco to refresh him on the way

Bidhu had never dreamed of finding himself reduced to such a sad condition Does the reader need to be told that it is he of whom we are speaking? Yet I

[1] A piece of cloth with coloured borders

believe if he had seen him when he led an easy idle life, without any care or concern, and was perfectly happy in all around him, he would never have known him now in his pitiable condition, and with such changed appearance, since his separation from his brother

So altered was he that he looked a totally different man That smile which was habitual to him, that sprightliness of temper combined with such levity as was natural to his age, that attention which he loved to pay to his person and dress—all were now lacking in him Yet one thing he never lost, he lost not his integrity. In spite of his destitution he maintained his honesty of purpose, and preserved intact that simplicity which had marked him as a boy

Leaning his head on his hand Bidhu sat there sorrowfully reflecting upon his past and his present condition He had never been from home before He looked around and felt like one abandoned to the wide wide world What should he do? Where should he go? He had no fixed purpose or destination

Since his separation from his brother, as long as he was allowed credit, Bidhu had been able to live pretty comfortably with his family But after that he had made shift to live by borrowing from friends This could not go on for ever, and he saw that he must sell his things in order that his family might not starve At first went his wife's ornaments one after the other, then this, then that, till, when all the movables in the house were gone, and there was not a utensil left, he found himself reduced to a state in which he saw he must either beg or starve

Bidhubhushan had to support his wife, his little boy and the maid-servant, Syama Since the separation

of the brothers, Syama had stuck by Sarala, and she never asked for wages One day Bidhu, wanting to change his clothes which were so dirty that he felt ashamed to go out in them, sent Syama for the washerman Very soon the washerman appeared

"Whose clothes are those, Ramdhan?" inquired Pramada, meeting him at the door

"Bidhu babu's I have brought them for him"

"A worthless fellow You call him a babu! But what does he pay you?"

"He is to pay at the rate of five rupees a year, but nearly ten months have passed and I have not been paid a cowry I will urge him for my dues to-day Now that the price of paddy is low, I should like to lay in a stock of it"

"I don't think you can get your dues in that way"

"What then do you advise me to do, madam?"

"Will you follow my advice?"

"I will"

"Well, keep his clothes and tell him you must have your money first"

"He will be angry with me"

"Angry with you! What do you care for his anger? Do you think such a beggarly fellow as he can do any harm to you? But look here, if you cannot get anything, see me when you go home, I may lend a rupee or two to help you"

Pramada's manner of talking, and the prospect of a loan from her gave him courage to follow her advice He walked in, and finding Sarala alone, said, "Here I have brought Bidhu babu's clothes, but I must have my dues first"

"Ramdhan," said Sarala in an imploring tone, "will

you not wait a little longer? We expect to get some money to-day We may be able to pay you something to-morrow"

"I have waited long enough and can afford to wait no longer I will take no refusal to-day"

"We have eaten nothing to-day We haven't so much as a pice"

The washerman eyed her bangles Thinking they were of gold he audaciously remarked, "No one in want, I should suppose, has a right to wear gold ornaments"

Sarala was very much offended at this bold remark Her face reddened, but she quickly checked herself and said, smiling, "What gold ornaments I had are all gone" Looking at her bangles she said, "These are gilt" And so deep was her sense of humiliation that she hid her face and wept

The washerman was much ashamed of himself for the offence he had given by his impudence So leaving the clothes he quickly retreated, and would not see Pramada though she had held out hopes of a loan to him

Immediately after the washerman had left, Syama made her appearance

"What are you at now?" she cried

"Hush!" said Sarala, "don't make a noise, Syama. Gopal is asleep, you will wake him"

"What does it matter if I do?"

"Are you out of your senses, Syama? Poor child! how he will feel his hunger if he wakes! It is so late, and he has had nothing to eat"

"See what I have got here," said Syama, as she produced from the folds of her cloth a few fruits and some sweetmeats.

"Where did you get these?" eagerly inquired Sarala, brightening up. And Syama only said, "Never mind where," and smiled

Whenever it happened there was nothing to eat, and such a thing was not of rare occurrence, Syama would be sure to get something for Gopal by doing some work or other for a neighbour She thus sometimes procured eatables for her mistress also But if ever she failed to get anything, she would spend a few pice out of her own savings to buy something for them to eat

Sarala was full of gratitude and said, "You are truly a mother to him, Syama"

Syama was deeply moved by her words With tearful eyes they went and roused Gopal

Bidhu put on his clean clothes, and leaving his home proceeded to the 'big house,' as it was called, the owner of which the zamindar of the village, had, on the previous day, very kindly offered to help him with some money He got there in a few minutes, but as the gentleman had just then lain down to take a sleep, as usual, after eating his meal, the servants who were by would not comply with his request to mention his business to their master for fear of disturbing him

"Rama," said Bidhu, stepping up to one of the servants, whom he knew by name, "I haven't eaten any food to-day Will you not go and tell this to your master?"

"Oh, you are such a troublesome fellow I tell you we cannot listen to you now"

"But I haven't eaten anything, and am so hungry, my friend"

"Well, what's that to me? I know there are fellows who will pretend to have eaten nothing, but who will be

sure to go to the grog-shop if they can get a few pice"

"Do you dare to talk like that?" cried Bidhu in a passion

"You are not to show your red eyes to me, I won't put up with it, I tell you You can wait or go just as you like, but I tell you once for all you can't see master till he is up, and I will not be bothered by you any more"

Bidhu was silenced by the insolent speech of the servant Mortified, he went and sat down on a stool hard by, while his eyes were nearly dimmed with tears

The servants soon lay down to sleep They were more used to leisure than to work, and like their master they wanted to take a sleep after their meal

Bidhu waited and waited till it was pretty near sunset, and then grew impatient The servants still lay wrapt in peaceful slumber and some of them snored on their backs Bidhu felt it was useless to wait any longer Night came on, and he was just about to leave when he heard the voice of the master calling to Rama He resumed his seat, thinking he would wait till the last

The master was awake now, but Rama still slept One of the other servants woke up with a start and hastened to give Rama a pull by the leg lest the master should want him

"Please, master," cried Rama, starting from his sleep and trying to shake off his drowsiness by rubbing his eyes till they were very red

"Don't forget me, friend," entreated Bidhu, as the servant moved to obey the summons of his master

"Oh, you are still there!" exclaimed Rama, stopping short and looking askance at him He then went to his master who said, significantly eyeing the servant,

"Well, to-day is Saturday There will be company here to-night"

"There is that bottle of port," said Rama "And sherry," pausing a little he said, "yes, only one bottle"

"One bottle of sherry! You surprise me There ought to be three if I am not mistaken"

The master was right There had been three bottles of sherry, but Rama had drunk up two of them

'That's why I wouldn't have the charge of it You seem to forget that I took out five bottles of sherry when there was company here the other day"

'Five—bottles—of—sherry?"

"Yes, five, though one of your particular friends has discontinued his visits for fear his father would carry out his threats to make an example of him"

"Who is that man there?" asked the master, glancing toward the waiting-room

"I don't know He seems a beggar Brahmin He says you kindly promised him some money"

"Oh, that fellow I met him yesterday. Tell him I am not well and cannot see him now"

These words, spoken in such a careless manner as to be audible to Bidhu, made him slink away immediately.

As the rich gentleman had offered to help Bidhu of his own accord, he had felt almost sure of some pecuniary assistance from him He was sadly disappointed; and now as he walked home not half so ill with hunger as with the thought of his dear wife and child, he said, 'What hypocrites these unfeeling rich folks are!" By contrast the maid, Syama, the untutored lowly-born Syama, seemed an angel He thanked her a thousand times in his heart for her good will to them When he reached home, he sank down on the steps

fatigued and almost broken-hearted. Sarala had felt sure of his success She fell aweeping now that she was cruelly disappointed

Shortly after Bidhu's return Pramada, knowing that they had had nothing to eat that day, inquired aloud, as she stood on the veranda, "What did your mistress cook to-day, Syama?"

Syama was quick to understand Pramada's taunts, and only said, "O thank you, madam, for your very kind inquiry"

"Well, it is strange you never asked me to dinner"

"Who are you talking to, Syama?" inquired Bidhu

Syama told him what Pramada had been saying He at once flew into a rage and exclaimed, 'Such baseness! I cannot bear it I will go and tell my brother"

"No, no, you need not—you must not go," said Sarala "Don t mind what she says Oh, don't lose your temper, don t, don t '

"What's that noise about, Syama?" inquired Pramada "Are you going to entertain any friends?"

"I say, that's devilish," cried Bidhu "Oh I cannot bear it We haven't had a morsel of food to eat, and she could be so mean as to taunt and insult us like that! That's more than flesh and blood can endure"

He started to his feet ready to rush out of the room, but Sarala caught his hand to stop him "Oh, you forget yourself," she exclaimed "Restrain your passion, oh do! There is nothing like forbearance. You should not talk disrespectfully of her She is your own elder brother's wife after all"

"Why, I suppose I ought to be full of reverence!

Such a devil of a wife! No, no, now let go my hand, Sarala I will speak to my brother, I will"

Releasing his hand by force, he rushed toward his brother's apartment Pramada ran into it before him as one affrighted, and hastily shut the door, giving the alarm that Bidhu was after her, and drunk.

Just at that instant Sasibhushan heard the dash of footsteps He started up in bed and cried, "Who is there?"

"Brother, brother," cried Bidhu, almost choked with passion, "we have had nothing the whole day to eat, and your wife has been taunting us in such a shameful way"

"Nonsense," cried Pramada "He knows not what he says He is not in his senses now"

Sasibhushan was much annoyed "Go you to bed now," he cried "If you have anything to say, you can say it to-morrow morning when you are sober"

"Sober!" exclaimed Bidhubhushan "Do you mean to say that I am drunk?"

"Get you to bed I say, and don't kick up a row here, you drunkard"

"Drunkard! *you*," retorted Bidhu, now losing all control over himself

"Do you dare call *me* a drunkard!" cried Sasibhushan "Take this drunken disorderly fellow to the police station," was his order to his servant

"*He* dare not come near me," cried Bidhu. "Come forward *you*, if you dare"

Sasibhushan was furious at this Opening the door he made a rush at his brother One thing peculiar about him was that his *dhuti* loosened whenever he gave way to passion Both would have fallen on

each other but for Sarala who, hurrying up at the moment, forcibly led her husband away to their room and shut the door

Bidhu's eyes were bloodshot After a moody silence of a minute or two he burst into tears "I will not remain here, Sarala," he said, "I wish I could leave this house this moment "

"Oh, let us try and be patient in our sufferings," said Sarala "Go not from home, but stay with us Your presence at least will be some comfort to me But we need not talk of it now Do dry your tears, for what does it avail you to weep ? "

"Will you believe me, Sarala ? " said Bidhu looking up into his wife's face, ' to tell the truth I do not care for myself All my concern is for you and that poor boy. How I wish that he had not been born ! How I wish you had not been married to me ! Oh ! then you might have been happy."

These words gave Sarala pain beyond all measure She tried to speak, but her feelings choked her With her own hands she attempted to wipe the tears from her husband's eyes

"Don't increase my pain, Sarala," exclaimed Bidhu with emotion, gently pushing her from him "If you never loved me so well, if you never felt so much for me, if you quarrelled as most women do, then it is certain I should not feel so much for you When I sold your ornaments, which I did at your request, oh ! how keenly I felt it I felt it as a sharp reproach to me to partake of the food that the price of your jewellery had bought But if you had never liked to part with your ornaments, perhaps I should not have felt so much for you I want to propose one thing to you, Sarala I think

you had better go and live with your father for a time As for Syama, let her go elsewhere Poor woman! why should she suffer with us?"

"How can I go and live with my father?" said Sarala, weeping "Oh, I can nowhere enjoy a moment, no, not even in heaven, leaving you in want and misery Sitting down to my meal I can scarcely touch my food when I think that perhaps you are suffering hunger Yet must I confess that more than once, thinking of our darling, I almost thought I would go But he has never yet gone without food Will not God, whose mercy has yet preserved his life, preserve him alike through all our troubles in future? Oh, in my heart I feel sure He will, so I will not go to my father's But as to what you propose about Syama I quite agree with you"

Bidhu called to Syama This day, unlike her usual way, she moved very slowly, and stood before him with an expression of deep sorrow in her look

"Syama," said Bidhu, in a tone which showed how it pained him to give utterance to what he was about to say, "we think it is unjust to allow you to continue in our service any longer You are far from comfortable here, and you cannot get your wages, as that is now altogether out of the question We would advise you to go elsewhere, and try and get into some other family where you may be happy, for every one should look after his own interests If, however, we be spared to see better days, you will be again welcomed here" Bidhu could hardly say more for his emotion, and he hung down his head and wept in silence

"Did I ever ask for my wages?" said Syama, crying "I never meant to stay with you for wages What

have I to do with money? If I am a burden on you, let me take my food elsewhere But oh! tell me not to go, for I cannot bear my Gopal out of sight Let me alone, I beseech you Oh, I want nothing of you but to be let alone"

"Compose yourself, Syama," said Bidhu "Oh do not cry Consider what I have said To stay with us is to starve It is true you love Gopal very dearly, but you may get children elsewhere to nurse, you will love them again as dearly, and you will not want to go elsewhere for your love of them after you have been with them for a time"

"It is true I may get children elsewhere to nurse, but where can I find one so good as my Gopal," said Syama, crying convulsively

"Oh, do be composed, Syama"

"I had a boy," said Syama crying "He was as good as my Gopal and much about his look and size I doted on him, and fondly gave him the name of Gopal But here I am apt to forget he is no more Oh, don't tell me to go elsewhere"

Bidhu turned to Sarala with tearful eyes and said, "What's to be done now?"

Sarala only wept in silence

"I have some money,' said Syama, turning to Bidhu "I intended it for Gopal If you will listen to my advice, I would ask you to join a *jattra* party In your absence we can manage to live on my savings If ever God prosper you, you can repay me my money, and you know it will be Gopal's when I am no more"

Bidhu and Sarala were greatly moved by Syama's words Bidhu decided upon going abroad to try his

fortune, and retiring thanked her most sincerely as the only friend he had in his need

The next morning he received from Syama five rupees out of her savings to defray his necessary expenses, and then formally taking leave of her, and of his wife, whose eyes overflowed with tears, and kissing his boy, left home with a heavy heart He took the road to Calcutta, where he had made up his mind to go About noon he came near Hanskhali, and, wanting to rest, he sat down at the foot of a tree by the wayside As he sat there thinking what he should do to get his living, while he thought he should be ashamed to join a party of players, a man came up and sat down beside him.

CHAPTER IX.

BIDHUBHUSHAN MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE

THE man to whom we have referred in the preceding chapter was tall, dark-skinned and of a rather slender make He looked above thirty He smoked his hookah, which he held in his left hand His right hand carried a bamboo stick A fiddle, carefully wrapped up in a very dirty piece of cloth, was slung on his left shoulder No shoes covered his feet, and being dressed only in a *dhuti*, which was very dirty, he was bare from his waist up to the neck. Round his waist was tied a small bundle, which contained his things, and a body-scarf was wrapped round his head like a pugree Bidhu was quite taken up with his own thoughts, so he did not notice the stranger when he came and sat down beside him The bubbling sound of his hookah, however, attracted his attention

"Who are you?" he asked, staring at him It seemed to him as if the stranger had just then come down out of the tree

"Only a traveller, don't be frightened," said the stranger "You have the courage to travel alone, and you get frightened at the sight of a man!"

"Oh, I was not frightened," said Bidhu, laughing at this remark "What's your name?"

"My name is Nilkamal, and my father's name is Kalachand My native village is Ramnagar. We are tenants of Devnath Bose"

Nilkamal was given to much talking He was a half-witted man Bidhu was quick to see that, and in order to make him talk, said, "Who is Devnath Bose?"

"Not know Devnath Bose!" Nilkamal was greatly surprised at his question His impression was that Devnath Bose was the richest man in the world

"I have never heard of him," said Bidhu "Will you tell me about him?"

"Why, the Boses ruled at one time They suffered great oppression at the hands of the brigands who used to be a terror in the country But still they are immensely rich It is very strange you haven't heard of them"

"Very strange, indeed," said Bidhu, and kept quiet.

Nilkamal smoked rather thoughtfully for a while and then holding the hookah to Bidhu, said, "A Sudra?"

"No, I am a Brahman," said Bidhu, smiling, as he took the *chillum* only

"Where are you going?" he asked, smoking

"Where am I going?" said Nilkamal "Going abroad to try my fortune But if you hear my story, you will pity me Well, we are three brothers My elder brother is called Krishnakamal, and my younger brother, Ramkamal They are idle fellows, who depend on me for their maintenance I have often told them that they must try to make themselves useful one way or other, or they would be very miserable But they

are not the sort to listen to me or any one else who may give them friendly advice. By following my own trade, though I worked hard, I could not earn enough to make the family comfortable. I want to see what I can do abroad."

Bidhu was amused by his manner of talking, and said, "Of course you hope to do better abroad?"

"Why, I am almost sure of it And what makes me so confident?" He lifted up his fiddle and said, "My skill, sir, my skill in this Why, it is easy enough for me to earn my living, but that's not all Fortune is my aim, and I know how to make it"

"Will you play for me on your violin?" said Bidhu, thinking he must have some skill in music

Nilkamal made no answer, but taking up his fiddle, undid the rag in which it was wrapped up, and then, putting it into tune, in less than half a minute began to play on it.

And now the tossing of the head, the rolling of the eyes and the twisting of the face, accompanied with a convulsion of the whole body, while he played at such a pace as to make the stick seem to fly over the strings, made him appear to Bidhu as if he were really in hysterics

"Can you sing?" asked Bidhu, with great difficulty repressing his laughter at this grotesque performance

"O yes," said Nilkamal, and began at once to sing to the music

"I'll fly where blue lotuses grow,
Should the lotus-eyed Rama command me to go
I'll bring lotuses bright and fair,
To offer at the lotus feet of mother"

Nilkamal sang with such a ludicrous vibration of his

voice that it was now quite impossible for Bidhu to restrain his laughter

Nilkamal was offended "You laugh!" said he, leaving off singing and laying down his violin "Do you mean to say that you understand singing better than I do? Govinda Adhicari himself spoke highly of me He offered me a salary of ten rupees, which I declined with thanks"

In his younger days Nilkamal played tolerably well. Govinda Adhicari indeed once thought him possessed of great promise, and declared that a year or two's lessons might do wonders for him He even offered to pay him five rupees a month just to have him under his care and train him properly, but Nilkamal would not consent to go with him. The opinion expressed by such a person as Govinda Adhicari was enough to turn his head, and he fancied he played on the violin like one inspired He often made a boast of his acquirements, contracted the habit of tossing his head and rolling his eyes like a hysteric patient, and soon became a most unbearable musician "Learning," he often observed, "is nothing compared with music Books are easily mastered, but what a difficult thing is music One may become a good scholar by continually poring over his books, but no one need expect to be a musician without a special aptitude for music" Nilkamal quite neglected his business, and devoted the whole of his time to music. Formerly he played but occasionally on his violin, but since he came in contact with Govinda Adhicari, it had been his constant companion His elder brother, Krishnakamal milked the cows of the gentle folks of their village for two annas per cow payable within the first week of each month. It lately happened that

Nilkamal was tempted to steal his brother's wages, when he had got them, to buy himself a new instrument. His brother was so enraged at his conduct, that he turned him out of the house "I tell you," said Nilkamal, as he went off from home, "you will one day repent of it You ignore my worth now, but go on; when I have plenty of money I will treat you as you deserve. I will not give you a handful of rice, though you may sit at my door and cry your eyes out, even to save you from starvation"

"Are you married?" asked Bidhu in order to pacify Nilkamal

With all his conceit Nilkamal was allowed to have a good heart He laughed outright and said, "No, will you find a match for me?"

"Well, I don't know what I can do until I try But where do you go now?"

"To Calcutta, just to see Govinda Adhicari He offered me a salary of ten rupees some five years ago. I have since made much progress I must have twenty rupees as salary now I am sure I shouldn't take less than fifteen at any rate And don't you think I can live on five rupees and save the rest? Well, if I get on in that way, at the end of a year I shall have saved enough to marry a pretty looking girl. What think you, eh?"

"He is so light-hearted," Bidhu thought to himself. "May be he left his home because he had found no peace in it But I am not half as confident as he is, though I understand a little music, but, perhaps, that little better than he does How I wish I could be as cheerful as he is But perhaps he has never been from home before Possibly he knows not what it is to be

disappointed He thinks he might easily get an offer of fifteen rupees or even twenty a month But, oh! how great will be his disappointment when he finds that his hopes are never to be realised, and that he can hardly even expect to have a salary of five rupees under a travelling showman" Thus thinking Bidhu could not but pity him

"Well, what are you running over in your mind? Now, what think you of that?" said Nilkamal.

"Oh, of course you will have saved enough, at the end of a year, to marry a pretty looking girl," said Bidhu "But you have never been from home before, I suppose?"

"No," said Nilkamal

"You want to go to Calcutta, but do you think you can travel alone to such a distant place as that?"

"Oh, I am not afraid"

"I am alone," Bidhu thought to himself "I think I had better travel with this man, he will be company for me But he seems to have no money about him, and I can ill-afford to bear his expenses on the way."

"Have you got any money about you?" asked Bidhu

"Money? my money is this," said Nilkamal, holding up his fiddle "I don't mind having no money about me If I but meet on the way one who understands music I can make a week's provision for myself You laughed, but many were moved to tears when I sang that song"

"Oh, it was not your singing but the tossing of your head that excited my laughter"

"The tossing of my head? Why, no one can help it—no one, I say, who understands music. Any one who has some taste for music will tell you that"

"Oh, of course you know best. But I wish to propose one thing to you"

"What is it?"

"I too am going to Calcutta. Let us travel together I say"

"Well, I have no objection, but you must know you are not to have any share of what I may earn by the display of my skill in music"

"Very well," said Bidhu, smiling The two then resumed their journey together, Bidhu thinking about his future, and Nilkamal humming his favourite song,

"I'll fly where blue lotuses grow,"

CHAPTER X.

FIRST NIGHT FROM HOME.

At nightfall Bidhu and Nilkamal came to a bazaar where they began to seek comfortable lodgings for the night In the bazaar were several mean shops with roofs of thatch, but these were all occupied, and in not one of them could they be accommodated for the night So on they went and discovered a light dimly burning in a house which stood a little way off from the bazaar. They walked up to it It was a general dealer's shop standing by itself in the midst of a few mango trees, so that after sunset it was hardly visible at a little distance Travellers did not care to go there if they could be lodged in the bazaar. Though visitors had arrived there, there was still room enough for one or two more. The shopkeeper was not in. He had gone to the market not far away. His wife minded the shop in his absence

"Can we be lodged in your shop for to-night?" inquired Bidhu

"To what caste do you belong?" she asked.

"I am a Brahman," said Bidhu, "but my companion here is a Sudra."

"You may lodge here if you like, and here are also two other Brahmans, but as for your companion, I don't

know where to find a place for him to sleep in, unless he would agree to pass the night under one of the trees; for being a Sudra he cannot be lodged with the Brahmans, you know"

Bidhu turned to his companion and said, "What say you to that, Nilkamal?"

"There will be room for me in the shed over there. I think I can go to it?" said Nilkamal, turning to the woman

"No, that's the place for the cow," said she.

"The cow can stay out under one of the trees for to-night"

"Yes, to make room for you as if you were my master. You can travel a long distance on foot and you cannot pass a night in the open air?"

Nilkamal was offended "Come along," said he to Bidhu. "We mustn't lodge here. We can put up in the village"

Bidhu was too fatigued. He only said, "You may go elsewhere if you like," and went and took his seat inside the shop.

Nilkamal was greatly offended at this. He instantly turned his back on his companion, as he said, "Good-bye to you, we part never to meet again."

Nilkamal walked a little distance, and then stopped. He was a timid and cowardly man The night was dark, and the path leading into the village was of such a kind that it was not very safe for a stranger to walk along it without a light He now felt he had acted hastily Much as he wished to go back he felt ashamed to do so. He, however, soon got the better of his sense of shame, and slowly retracing his steps, came and stood in the shop-yard again "It is not right," said he to

Bidhu, speaking aloud, "to leave you alone at this time of night, and so I have come back"

Bidhu, who by now knew his companion well enough to feel sure he would return, only said with a smile, "I am glad you are back, Nilkamal"

"You may rest where you are," said Nilkamal. "I must be content to pass the night under one of the trees as there is no helping it, I suppose"

What Nilkamal, however, had in his mind was that either they must both pass the night in the open air, or he must disturb the rest of his companion by singing the whole evening

Bidhu sat near the two Brahmans, who had come before him His clothes, as we have before observed, were shabby, but these two Brahmans were well dressed By conversing with them Bidhu knew they were students, who prosecuted their studies at a college in Calcutta, whither they were returning at the end of their winter vacation The storekeeper's wife was busy getting things ready for them to prepare their evening meal Indeed, she seemed most anxious to please and oblige them as best she could To our friend, Bidhu, however, she was rather indifferent. She wanted to be told thrice or four times to do a thing he wanted done; and then it was evidently not very willingly done Bidhu was greatly in need of a meal, having eaten nothing the whole day. On asking her where he might cook his food, she bluntly said, "In that corner. Take down that *handi*,[1] and for fuel there are bundles of sticks in the shed."

Bidhu was indignant at this answer and said, "What's the good of my coming here if I am to do everything for myself?"

[1] An earthen vessel, generally used for cooking

"And who wanted you to come here?" she said snappishly.

Bidhu was very angry now. But what did his anger signify? He was not at home in his own house. This he felt. So stifling his indignation as best he could, and smiling, he rather facetiously said, "You treat me cruelly. I am sure I don't deserve to be thus cruelly dealt with."

Being displeased with his humour the woman said at once, "None of your jokes, sir, if you please. I tell you this plain thing—if you want to stay, you are not to ask me to do anything you can quite well do for yourself."

Bidhu could no longer brook her impertinence. Burning with indignation he exclaimed, "You are a wretch to talk like that. I will not stay another minute in your shop."

As he was about to leave, in came the husband carrying a bundle on his head. "What's the row about?" he inquired, putting down his load.

"Why, here is a nabob who will not move a step to have what he wants," said his wife.

Turning to Bidhu, the man said, "What caste do you belong to?"

"I am a Brahman," said Bidhu.

The man made a low obeisance and said, "I am at your service, sir; sit down there, please."

Bidhu complied with his request. Nilkamal was brave now and said, "Such insolence! I cannot bear it, nobody can. I had a great mind to——"

Nilkamal did not complete his sentence. He did not dare to do it for fear of offending the storekeeper, who was a match for a dozen like him.

The two Brahmans who seemed to greatly interest the man's wife were of youthful age. They had been

newly converted to Brahmaism During the squabble they had been at prayers One was solemnly speaking the praise of God in a low murmuring voice, his eyes were shut The other, though he sat in a prayerful attitude, stole now and then a glance at the shop-woman, while he constantly kept his eyes on his companion, as if he were fearful of detection But he shut his eyes and pretended to be deep in his devotion as the husband made his appearance.

"Who are these fellows?" asked the shopkeeper in a rough tone

"They are Brahmans," said his wife, "college students They are praying to God Please don't disturb them now"

The man at once got offended with his wife "Why did you allow them to enter the shop?" he said rather angrily. "No Brahmans are they, but Brahmas I knew that at a glance The Brahmas, I know, eat food of any man's cooking We have nothing to do with them or their new-fangled religion."

Then turning to the young men he said, "Get out, sirs, I am a Hindu. You cannot be lodged here Come, out, sirs, pack out, I say How do you expect to be allowed to take up a Hindu house?"

The young men opened their eyes as though they had just woke up from a profound slumber, and looking up saw before them the rough tall figure of the rustic shopman, whose loud, but resolute, voice bade them leave the shop without a moment's delay.

"Don't be angry with us, friend," they spoke together in an almost imploring tone. "We are Brahmans, we are not telling you a lie"

"Nonsense Get on your legs, sirs, and don't keep

me waiting for nothing" This he said, darting an angry look at the young man whose eyes had fully betrayed his character. So fiercely did the man look at him that the student turned his face away

But as the young men still kept their seats, and seemed rather unwilling to leave the shop, the shopman grew exceedingly angry, and stepping up seized the student by the arm as he exclaimed, "Get out, sirs, or I won't answer for what I may do" As he said this, he looked significantly about him A stout stick stood against one corner of the room Directly the young men caught sight of it, they got up and left the shop without another word

After they had gone and the room had been cleared, the master said to his wife, "You were very busy attending on those two fellows, eh? To attend on them so diligently and quite neglect the other two customers! Very fine indeed"

The woman kept quiet, for she knew her husband's temper only too well

When it was quiet again in the shop, the husband sat down to smoke a *chillum* of tobacco His wife, now transformed, as if by magic, into a good and gentle creature, became so willing and obedient that before long Bidhu and Nilkamal finished their meal, and were ready to lie down for the night For Nilkamal there was space enough within the room For each a mat to sleep on was spread on the dry mud floor of the shop, and their bundles serving for pillows, they lay down to rest.

For a long time Bidhu could get no sleep The thought of his wife and child was uppermost in his mind Besides he was in a strange place and exposed to all the inconveniences of having to spend a night at

a paltry shop on the way. Nilkamal, however, quickly fell asleep, and as he lay snoring on his back he seemed to have very few cares For the first time in his life Bidhu experienced the pangs of separation The room was dark. He looked beyond; and there were the trees which stood like ghosts with their long outspreading branches The mice ran about squeaking and making all sorts of queer noises There were also the cockroaches crawling or flying round him A superstitious fear seized on him. "Nilkamal, Nilkamal," he called out, sitting up, unable to lie still any longer Nilkamal turned upon his side as he muttered drowsily, "Let me alone, don't disturb me now."

"Get up, Nilkamal, won't you have a smoke? It is not wise to sleep so soundly on the way"

Nilkamal was awake now "Why, what harm is it?" he said "I need have no fear from thieves"

"I know that," said Bidhu, laughing, "but I do not mean that. I have a favour to ask of you. You are splendid on the fiddle, but I have scarcely any gift that way If you will kindly teach me how to play on it I shall be indebted to you"

Nilkamal felt greatly flattered. "Oh, I shall be very glad to teach you," he said, sitting up abruptly. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure, I assure you Shall we begin now—to-night?"

"O yes, the sooner the better," said Bidhu.

Nilkamal was quickly ready with his instrument and said, as he was about to begin, "Now pay close attention while I play"

With this he began to play and sing his favourite song in his usual ludicrous manner, while Bidhu lay down again and quietly went to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

HEM AND HIS SISTER SVARNALATA

BIPRADAS CHAKRAVARTI, of the district of Burdwan, was a rich man He had not been born in a rich family, but he held a lucrative post in the Commissariat, and he was in the service at the time of the Sepoy mutiny of 1857. The post that he then held became the source of his prosperity Throughout the period of his service his heart was set on gain, and in its pursuit he was never very scrupulous He was one of those old-class orthodox Hindus of his time, who, though otherwise very good in their way, were not very conscientious in the acquisition of money Though he was so prosperous, he was not proud, on the contrary, he was very obliging and kind Far from stingy in his habits he spent money with no sparing hand, but he was by no means lavish in his personal expenses He was pious and hospitable. The various religious ceremonies were celebrated at his house at much expense and with great feasting His wife, however, did not live long to share in his prosperity After her death he retired, and lived with his family at his own house in the country He had a son and a daughter The son was named Hemchandra, and the daughter, Svarnalata He was a very

kind and indulgent parent, who liked to make allowances for young people

The Durga puja festival was at hand Those of the village, who had been staying away, being either in Government service or privately employed, had all come home for the holidays, to which they had been wistfully looking forward Amongst others, Hem had returned His father liked to be regularly present at his meals This he did in affectionate care for his son, lest anything in the world should ever remind him that he had lost his mother

Bipradas often said to his mother, for his mother was alive, " Mother, Hem is very dear to me. ' I should never like to oppose his will in anything "

One day Bipradas, not seeing his daughter, inquired, " Where is Svarna, mother ? "

Hearing her father ask for her, Svarna at once ran to him with outstretched arms, crying, " Here I am, papa, I was in my brother's room "

" You are a good dear," said her father, as he affectionately took his daughter in his arms. " How have you daubed your face and hands with ink, my love ? "

" I have been learning to write with brother, papa "

" Learning to write ? What's the use of your ever learning to write, my love ? "

" Why, what's the harm in her learning to write, papa ? " said Hem, as he quickly appeared before his father, when he heard him make that remark " Most girls read and write There are girls' schools in Calcutta "

" Well, well, you may do as you like, but who is to teach her while you are away ? "

" She will teach herself, papa She has learnt to

write the alphabet quickly enough I dare say she will have made much progress before I leave for Calcutta She seems so willing to learn"

Bipradas tenderly passed his hand over his daughter and said, "You would be a Sarasvati[1] or a Lakshmi,[2] which, dear?"

"I should like to be both, papa"

Her father looked on her for a moment with feelings of great tenderness A tear stood in his eye He gently set her down as he kissed her forehead and said, "Go and learn to write with your brother my love"

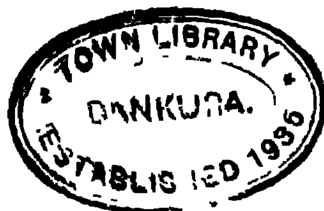
The festival soon came on and lasted three days, which were passed in feasting and merriment Even in those hours of bustle and activity, not for a moment did Bipradas forget his own children The vacation was soon over, and Hem returned to Calcutta When the day came on which he was to start, his sister had really made much progress in reading and writing

"I will soon send you a new book," said Hem to his sister at parting "But if you can write a letter to me, I will give you a beautiful flower of gold to wear in your hair when I come home again in March"

"You are sure you won't forget?" said Svarna, smiling.

Her brother said, "I am sure I shall not, but you must try to win the prize"

[1] The Goddess of Learning. [2] The Goddess of Good Luck



CHAPTER XII

PRAMADA AND HER MOTHER

AFTER the separation of the brothers, which she had so wickedly brought about, Pramada had not quarrelled with any one for some days But after that, as might be expected, she grew tired of the unaccustomed tranquillity, and at last was minded to pick a quarrel with Granny Digambari, though it was very kind of the old woman to take charge of the kitchen and so help her neighbour. She wanted to pick a quarrel with her because she was ugly, black of skin, and pilfered her salt, mustard-oil, and the like, which no mistress of a house could tolerate Did she dare to accuse her of all this to her face? Oh, no, old Digambari would then have left her house that instant, never to cross her threshold again But she went about and told tales Digambari was soon told of the imputations against her character. One day she looked sullen, the next she bore herself defiantly, and on the third day openly declared her intention to have it out with Pramada. What did she care for Pramada or for her husband? Accordingly, there was an encounter Both gave loose to their tongues and accused and abused each other with an astonishing fluency. The quarrel began with unusual

spirit on both sides, till it was abruptly brought to an end by Digambari, who, stepping up to Pramada, defiantly thrust her thumbs in her face, and followed up that action by saying that she was not her paid servant, she did not care a fig for her, and to this added all the terms of abuse at her command She then triumphantly left the field of action, to the utter discomfiture of her enemy Pramada had never been beaten in a quarrel before But this time she had found her match

Pramada was so mortified that she went and shut herself up in her room and wept bitterly She, however, soon dried her tears, and though she felt her humiliation deeply, she was forced to put on a look of perfect unconcern in the presence of her husband When Sasibhushan, after his return from work at the usual time, inquired of his wife about Granny Digambari, she answered without the least hesitation, "I have sent her away" Her vanity would not permit her to tell the honest truth

"Sent her away!" exclaimed Sasibhushan "What was her fault, pray?"

Pramada told her husband a string of lies in justification of her conduct She had been warm in her praise of Digambari not long since, and now that she declared that she was a wicked impudent woman, her husband said, "You are a strange character, my dear, you sing a neighbour's praises one day and cry her down again the next But who is to prepare our meals now? You cannot, because of your poor health What's to be done?"

"You needn't be anxious about having your meals in time"

"I do not care for myself I mean I cannot bear to

see the children go without their meals when there's no need for it "

"No one need go without his meals in this house," said Pramada, looking very grave "I am going to have mother here to-morrow I am sure she will come when she knows the state of things "

Sasibhushan knew perfectly well what the coming of Pramada's mother meant He looked embarrassed and without thinking said, "How I wish I had never separated from my brother "

Pramada's brother could not be left behind if his mother went to live with her daughter, as there was no one else in the house to prepare his meals Then there was Pramada's maternal uncle This gentleman, it was probable, would not like to live alone, and would pack up if the rest of the family left Sasibhushan saw all this in a moment, and again said, quite forgetting in his embarrassment in whose presence he was, "How I wish I had not separated from my brother "

"Who wanted you to separate ?" said Pramada, in a tone which showed that she was offended.

Sasibhushan made no answer. He was evidently occupied with his own thoughts

"Who wanted you to separate ?" repeated his wife "I didn't, and you know it Why do you keep quiet and hang down your head like that ? You need not be ashamed to tell the honest truth that you have yourself to thank for it and no one else "

Sasibhushan was still silent, and his wife continued, "But no one is preventing you from living jointly with your brother again as you used to do That is absolutely in your power Why, you cannot have a better friend in the world than your precious brother But I think

I may be easily spared, if I am a trouble to you. I know I am a trouble to you, yes, I can see that without your telling me. I must insist on your sending me to my father's "

Sasibhushan now looked up into his wife's face and said, "I didn't mean any offence, my dear, I am sure I didn't."

"What do you mean? What would you have? Come, out with it There is nothing like plain-dealing I always look after your interests Perhaps that is my fault But why do you not send me to my father's house and get rid of me at once?"

"I am very sorry I have offended you, my dear. I beg your pardon"

Pramada was sullen.

"Where are the children?" asked Sasibhushan, wanting to give a turn to this unpleasant conversation

"Bepin is gone to see his grandmother," said Pramada, without looking up

"And Kamini?"

"Gone to bed"

"Gone to bed? She won't have a meal to-night?"

"Who is to cook?"

"I don't mind cooking myself"

Sasibhushan went to engage himself in the duties of the kitchen, and Pramada took to her bed, declaring that her complaint had proved very troublesome to her

Pramada wanted to be coaxed, and begged hard to get out of bed when her supper was brought in, though it must be said that her complaint did not prevent her from doing full justice to her meal

"I think you ought to have told Bepin to bring his grandmother with him," observed Sasibhushan, when his wife had finished her meal.

Pramada had sent Bepin to fetch her mother, and not merely to see her as she had told her husband. So when Sasibhushan made that remark out of curiosity to know what she would say to it she looked rather confused and said nothing.

Sasibhushan was sleepy and began to yawn after sitting in silence for a while. So he rose and went to bed and quickly fell asleep. Pramada also went and laid her down by him. The night passed in sleep.

When Bepin communicated the news he bore, to his grandmother, that worthy lady was simply delighted. She would have been overjoyed to come at once, but her son not being at home, she was compelled to put off her departure till the next morning. Yet so great was her impatience to be gone that all that night she could not sleep a wink because of her excitement, and eagerly waited the approach of morn. She could not but be in a passion with her son, whom she reproached within herself for his foolish absence from home. It was not till after sunset that Gadadhar returned. Gadadhar was the name of Pramada's brother.

We shall describe this gentleman in a few words. He was tall, dark-complexioned and cadaverous, with a remarkably small head covered with short bristling hair, a somewhat slender neck, and large and clumsy feet. He spoke with a nasal accent, and he was in addition weak and of an evil nature. His mother's constant complaint was that Pramada had been quite indifferent about his education, which, to her thinking, she owed it as a duty to her brother to see to. Pramada's apathy in this particular was, therefore, held by her mother to be truly culpable.

"Well, Bepin, what brings you here now?" asked

Gadadhar, as he met his nephew on his return at dusk.

"Where have you been so long, Gadadharchandra ?" asked his mother as Bepin was about to reply

His mother loved to call him Gadadharchandra, though he was contemptuously called Gada in the neighbourhood

"What has kept you so long, my love ?" repeated his mother

"Business, mother, business"

"Ah, the every-day business of wasting your precious time Here is our child, Bepin, you don't seem to think that it is your duty to make him comfortable while he is with us"

"He can make himself comfortable He is quite free here"

He then turned to his nephew and said, 'Make yourself at home, Bepin Do you smoke, dear ?"

"What a foolish question!" interposed his mother. "He is too young to smoke"

"Nonsense, mother; you must remember I took to smoking when I was about his age" Turning to the boy he said again, 'Well, do you smoke, Bepin ?"

"No," said the boy, looking rather ashamed

"But I want very much to have a smoke," said Gadadhar "Mother, prepare a *chillum* of tobacco"

As his mother moved to carry out his order, for she always attended to this business herself owing to her excessive fondness for her son, he inquired again, "What brings you here now, Bepin ?"

"I have come for grandmother," replied Bepin

"That's very good," said Gadadhar, with a mirthful laugh "There can be nothing better"

Turning to his mother he said, "You must confess you were wrong, mother, when you made the remark that Pramada was getting distant towards you"

As this was spoken in the presence of Bepin, his mother at once denied the charge from prudential motives, saying, "When did I make that remark, Gadadharchandra? How very foolish of you to talk like that!"

Gadadhar was going to continue speaking, but just then his mother put the hookah in his hand and said again, "Now, smoke and don't talk nonsense"

Gadadhar said no more He soon seemed to be enjoying his *chillum* of tobacco as he sent forth puffs of smoke which curled and played about his head

"Will you go and find some shrimps, Gadadharchandra? For your nephew will have no fish to eat, if you don't try and get some"

"I can't go now, mother. The pulse will do Cook the food that sister has sent"

His mother frowned as much as to say, "You are not to mention that before your nephew."

"Don't look like that, mother, or you will frighten me out of my wits"

"You are a bad and stupid boy," said his mother, rather angrily

"I say it is no use your trying to keep anything from me Do you mean to say that no food was sent? If you do, you are telling a downright lie"

"Gadadharchandra, I am sure I am not going to stand this nonsense from you any longer," cried his mother, darting an angry look at him

"None of your temper, mother, or I shall expose you in a manner you will never dream of."

As the safest course that she could adopt was to retire, she left the room as she remarked, "I am really ashamed of you, Gadadharchandra, I am really ashamed of you"

Gadadhar talked with Bepin till his mother wanted them to come to supper, after which they went to bed together and quickly fell asleep

Not a wink of sleep, however, was there to be for Gadadhar's mother, who was engaged the whole night in putting things in order and making preparations for their departure, every now and then looking out to see if it was yet morning

The next day Sasibhushan had just got out of bed when Gadadhar showed himself, immediately followed by his mother, who walked right in front of Bepin

"Here we are at last Where are you, sister?" cried Gadadhar

Pramada was not yet up from bed, but as soon as she heard her brother's voice she got up with a start, and hastened to give them a proper reception She led them into her bedroom, and when they had seated themselves, she sat down by them, and they had a long chat together Sasibhushan regarded his brother-in-law with feelings of great repugnance and mistrust

Gadadhar did not like talking, so he very soon set about a thorough inspection of the house He went all round it and over it, looked into every place that seemed queer to him, and stopped to examine anything that particularly attracted his attention In two or three days he knew every nook and corner Nothing, while he lived at his brother-in-law's, ever escaped his searching eye, and sweetmeats in particular were always sure to be missing, though they might be put away in a

secret place behind the bedstead, or elsewhere where they were considered to be safe.

For the first time that morning Pramada tried to appear most agreeable, and paid great attention to her mother and brother Sasibhushan, however, was very much vexed He looked upon Pramada's brother as though he were his evil genius, whose very look seemed ominous to him By and by Pramada's mother had the domestic management all to herself, and became to all intents and purposes the mistress of the house And thus it came about that Sasibhushan lost his personal independence in his own home. Gadadhar was put to school at his mother's request, and all things seemed to go on well for a time

CHAPTER XIII

SARALA MISSES HER HUSBAND

When Bidhubhushan was gone, Sarala was very very miserable Why had she let him go? Was not starving a thousand times better than separation? Yet if he had stayed, would it not have been selfish and unkind of her to let him suffer on her account? How it would have pained her to see him go without food! How much it would have distressed him to see their dear child suffer hunger without a murmur! She remembered every kind word her husband had ever spoken to her, or when he had seemed to be gentler than at other times The thought of how she was grieved at seeing her husband lose his temper at anything, or at hearing of his having quarrelled with anyone, never occurred to her now But she thought of his sufferings whenever he had been laid on a bed of sickness by fever or perhaps a bad headache or other illness Suppose he were to fall ill abroad Who would attend his sick-bed? Who would nurse him? These thoughts made her feel very miserable, as she sat on the roof, resting her head on her hand and shedding tears in abundance

When Bidhubhushan left, Sarala had gone on to the roof to watch him With a fixed look she followed him

with her eyes as long as she could Bidhubhushan also stopped frequently to look back at his wife, till a peepul tree altogether screened her from his sight, and he saw her no more. Then with a deep sigh he wiped the tears from his eyes Sarala sat on where she was She wished she could run and induce him to return But to what? To want and disgrace! She would rather miss his company than see him back amid his sufferings But she could have felt happy and contented with her lot, if Pramada had only let her win her bread by her drudgery in the family and spared her feelings Sarala was too deeply occupied with her own thoughts to notice the flight of time There she was though it was nearly noon, and Syama had done the cleaning and washing, and made the necessary arrangements for the preparation of the meal

"You are still here!" said Syama, reproving her gently

Sarala turned with a start and quickly dried her tears

"Come, cheer up," Syama went on by way of consolation "Don't be brooding over it Husbands are going from home every day It won't do for them to be tied down to their wives. Be of good cheer Fortune may favour him, and you will be happy yet, happier than you think"

"But come, get up now, it is nearly noon, and you have to prepare the meal," she said again, after a brief pause

"I have no appetite, Syama You go and cook your own meal"

"But Gopal must not fast. He will be home very soon from school"

"Oh, my dear, how could I have forgotten my own child. But is it as late as you say?"

She looked up and saw the sun was nearly overhead She hastened downstairs, and quickly busied herself in preparing the meal When it was ready, Gopal had his dinner brought to him on a small plate Syama ate as usual, but Sarala could eat little or nothing.

That day passed, and the next and next Thus days came and went; and though after a time Sarala no longer felt the pangs of separation, a great anxiety remained which ate into her vitals like a canker-worm Had there been no lessening of pain and sorrow in this world, life would have become an insupportable burden

Pramada had sent for her mother a few days after the separation of the brothers. So long as Bidhubhushan was at home, Gadadhar and his mother had not dared to insult his wife in any way, nor had they exchanged a word with her, though Pramada occasionally made cutting remarks, to which Sarala would pay no heed at all Now that Bidhubhushan was away, Pramada and her mother and brother meanly took advantage of his absence to torment Sarala.

"What has become of your good sweet master, Syama?" Pramada tauntingly asked one day, as she stood on the veranda. "I have seen nothing of him for some time."

"Why, you will see him again, if you are not called away too soon, madam"

"What! dare you talk to me in that fashion! A good shoe-beating would cure you of your impudence"

"Shoe-beating!" cried Syama, in a passion.

"Oh, keep quiet, Syama," exclaimed Sarala. "Let her say what she likes. Keep quiet, do"

"Why should she say what she likes? What right has she? I won't bear with her, not I. And I am not at all afraid of her husband."

"Go on, I will humble your pride."

"I despise your threat," cried Syama.

Pramada retreated. The blood rose to her neck and face She was too much enraged to speak Her breathing was quick, and the frequent ringing of her ornaments indicated the violent movement of her limbs Pramada's mother looked as though she had dropped from the clouds She would fain have taken the side of her daughter, but she was cowed by the boldness of Syama

"Be composed, daughter, be composed," she said. "They are only trying to upset you, I can tell you. Speak to your husband to-night, do Let us see what he says. Why, it is dreadful to live here."

Pramada's mother had just spoken these words when Gadadhar made his appearance.

"What's the matter, sister?" asked Gadadhar in some surprise, noticing the angry look of Pramada; for he had been out and knew not what was the matter.

His sister saying nothing, he asked again, "What's the matter, sister?"

"Hold your tongue, you poor unfortunate pitiful idiot," said Pramada petulantly.

Gadadhar had grown very proud of his new home, having a bellyful to eat, and living a sort of reckless life, without thought or care of any kind. So when his sister reproached him in those epithets, he looked as if he would say, "What do you mean, sister?"

His mother, however, explained the matter to him, and he at once flew into a fury and exclaimed, "The

wretch ! I will teach her a good lesson." With this he snatched up a cudgel, which stood against a corner, and rushed toward Sarala's room to punish Syama

"I will see which of us is stronger, you or I," he cried "And I would like to teach your mistress a lesson too"

Neither Pramada nor her mother tried to prevent him On the other hand they seemed to enjoy the sight

Sarala was terrified and hastened to shut the door, but Syama prevented her, saying, "Don't shut the door, he is a coward" Then catching up a knife and standing at the door, she cried, "Where is that idiot, I'll cut off his ears, I will"

Gadadhar was at once brought to a standstill, when he beheld a knife in Syama's hand Not daring to move a step further, he cried, "What! cut off my ears, you ugly scold! I will go for the police."

"Go, I don't care," cried Syama. There was a police-station in the village, and Gadadhar was acquainted with a constable there He thought that if he went and asked him, he would readily come with him, and so Syama would be quickly brought to her senses So thinking he ran to the station. The constable, to whom he was known, happened at the time to be making some entries, so he stepped up to the sub-inspector and said, "Sir, Syama wants to cut off my ears."

"Who are you?" asked the officer.

"I—I—you—know Sasi babu of course, sir? He is my sister's husband"

"What did you say the name of the other party was?"

"Syama, sir"

"Are you a relation of hers?"

"Oh, no, she is a servant-woman, sir."

"What's your name?"

"Gadadharchandra Chakravarti."

"And your father's name?"

"It is no use my telling you his name, sir. You don't know him."

"Never mind, sir, I want your father's name."

"My father's name is Ramdev Chakravarti."

"Well, what's your occupation?"

"I go to school, sir."

"Who pays for your going to school?"

"Father—no, my sister, sir"

"You are not sure, which?"

"I am quite sure, my sister, sir, and I am ready to swear it"

"How funny! No, there is no need to swear" And turning to the constable, who all the while had been laughing with his face turned away, the sub-inspector said, "Rames, do you know this fellow?"

"Yes, sir," said Rames. And he gave such an account of Gadadhar that the sub-inspector said at once, "Well, my dear fellow, I will see to your case What's that woman's name again? But never mind her name Now, do you say she has cut off your ears?"

Gadadhar unconsciously raised his hand to his ear

"Do you miss it?" asked the police officer, very much amused

"No, sir; but she has threatened to cut off my ears"

"A woman has threatened to cut off your ears, and you are here to complain of her! Oh, I am ashamed of you"

"Not the sort of a woman you think her to be If you saw her look as she did, as she shook her knife at me and swore at me, you would be afraid yourself"

"Oh, then she must be a terrible woman"

"A most terrible woman, sir, she must be taught such a lesson as she will never forget in all her life"

"Yes, but you see we can't do anything unless she has done some injury to you So you had better go back and pick a quarrel with her again, and when she has cut off your ears, just come to me, and we shall see if we can get the law to hang her for it"

But as the sub-inspector said this in a tone which plainly showed that he was joking, Gadadhar exclaimed, "If you are not going to take up my case, I must go to the District Court"

"You had better do so, for yours is too big a case to be tried here"

Gadadhar looked offended, and was about to come away, when the officer, telling Rames in a whisper that he was going to have a bit of fun, called a constable, and said, pointing to Gadadhar, "To the lockup"

"You order *me* to the lockup!" cried Gadadhar

"Hush! don't make a fuss, sir," said the constable, Hari Sing, stepping up and forcibly leading him on by the arm

"You shall regret it," cried Gadadhar, as he struggled to make him let go his arm

"No resistance, sir, or I must handcuff you," said Hari Sing.

Gadadhar, having no idea of what handcuffs were like, and probably thinking that they must be something worse than the lockup, suffered himself to be quietly led on

"You don't know who I am," said Gadadhar, as they reached the door of the cell He was about to say something about his respectable connections, when Hari Sing

most unceremoniously thrust him in and locked the door, saying, "Can't help it, sir, must do my duty."

Gadadhar found the cell so dark and close that he screamed for fright and begged Hari Sing with many entreaties to let him out. No one heeded his cries, and there he was left shrieking and entreating and crying as hard as he might

Some two hours afterwards the sub-inspector walked up to the door of the lockup. "Open the door," he said to Hari Sing. No sooner was the order executed than out rushed Gadadhar, but the sub-inspector stopped him, and in a sufficiently severe tone, said, "There, will you pick a quarrel with a woman again?"

"No, sir, never," said Gadadhar, looking imploringly up to his face

"Down on your knees and drag your nose along the ground up to the mark I am about to make on it"

Gadadhar at once obeyed through sheer dread of the lockup.

"Rise," said the police officer, "and begone, and let me hear of you no more."

Sasibhushan had come home shortly after Gadadhar had gone to the police station. The *cutchery* had closed a little earlier that day. On his return, seeing that his wife was sullen he asked the cause of it. Pramada told him all save that she was the aggressor. Sasibhushan was indignant, and Pramada's mother opportunely threw in a word or two But what did his anger signify? He could neither chastise Syama nor go to law to punish her insolence It was wiser to pocket the insult, and so he held his tongue.

CHAPTER XIV.

SASIBHUSHAN AND HIS MASTER'S ACCOUNTS

SASIBHUSHAN prospered so well that he found himself a substantial man within a few years of his entrance into the service of the zamindar He began on five rupees a month, but he quickly succeeded in securing such favour with his master that he got one lift after another, till he filled a very respectable post with a salary of five times the amount. He now needed but one more lift to make him *dewan* [1] And not long afterwards the master began seriously to think of raising him to the highest post in his gift, not that its present occupant was incompetent, but that he believed Sasibhushan would manage far better, being a very intelligent man, and not one to continually trouble him with this, that, and the other thing. To look over accounts was a tedious task The master loved pleasure far better than work, and wanted to have more leisure so that he might the better enjoy the company of his congenial friends In this respect he did not follow the example of his forefathers, who had given no thought to pleasure and who working hard had managed with two or three hands in their employ better than he did with nearly a dozen.

[1] The highest officer in the service of an influential zamindar.

Sasibhushan had all those qualities which often help to make a man's fortune in the world. Though he had very few scruples, he was active and intelligent, shrewd in business, and well knew how to ingratiate himself with one whose favour he wanted to gain No wonder he succeeded so easily in winning a place in his master's heart.

The master had great confidence in Sasibhushan All payments were made by him, and whatever he did was all right and did not require the master's inspection.

Having got ready the accounts of some construction works Sasibhushan went to obtain his master's sanction before sending them away

"What are those papers?" asked the master as Sasibhushan entered

There was a drinking party in the sitting-room, and the brandy bottle was quickly transferred behind the couch at a look from the master

"I have got the accounts of the construction works ready, sir," said Sasibhushan, walking up and standing before him, holding the papers in his hand

"You are sure there is no mistake?"

"I do not think there is, but I cannot be certain until you have looked over the papers yourself."

The master took this as a compliment to himself, as rather implying that he was an adept at accounts. "I don't want to look over them," he said. "I am sure the figures are all correct."

One of Sasibhushan's subordinates, who had accompanied him, gave him a significant look, but Sasibhushan at once met it with a frown, and the subordinate looked down to the ground

"I think you had better get rid of them if there is

nothing else to look over," said one of the master's friends in a whisper.

The master paused a little and then said, "You do not wish me to look over anything else just now?"

"No, sir, but I am sure this will not take time," said Sasibhushan, turning the papers over very quickly in his hand.

There was the uncorked brandy bottle behind the couch, and there also was some liquor poured into the glass, which would lose its strength if allowed to stand for any length of time So the master said, "There is no need to look over the accounts. I should just like to know the total cost"

"The total cost is thirty-one thousand three hundred and thirteen rupees," said Sasibhushan, whose voice shook a little as he told this downright lie.

"And what was the estimate?"

"Twenty-four thousand rupees." But the answer was made not without some hesitation The master was rather surprised. But was it not rather lowering to look over the accounts for the matter of the difference of a few thousands in the presence of his friends? The master felt it was.

"The cost often exceeds the estimate," observed one of his companions.

For his vanity rather than for what his friend remarked, the master quietly took the papers from Sasibhushan's hand, signed them, and then handed them back with a look of supreme indifference

Having gained what he wanted Sasibhushan returned to the office in high feather. In the evening he went home with his subordinates to divide the money thus got among themselves

CHAPTER XV.

SASIBHUSHAN AND HIS PATERNAL HOME

SASIBHUSHAN soon became head of the office. After Gadadhar and his mother had come, there was some inconvenience for want of sufficient accommodation in the house There was the sitting-room in an unfinished state Sasibhushan now thought that he must have it completed, and told his wife so. Pramada, however, was not of his mind. She hated his brother, and could not bear him to have his share of the room She, therefore, said that if her advice was worth anything, she should like him to have a separate sitting-room of his own. Sasibhushan had not the moral courage to say *nay*, even if he would, and so there was nothing left but to do as his wife wished.

It shortly happened that Sasibhushan was offered a plot of land for sale in the neighbourhood, and agreed to purchase it for the new building. But the question was in whose name it should be bought. Not in his own name surely, as then his brother might want to get a share of it. Neither in the name of his wife for the same reason This seemed a very important question to settle; but Sasibhushan never settled it; for when the plot of land was purchased it was, as one

might have anticipated, purchased in the name of his wife.

At first the intention was to have a single room only But after the building work had commenced, Pramada showing how greatly they stood in need of a good comfortable house of their own, Sasibhushan had a plan drawn up, and in a few months a very decent two storied house had been erected To it Sasibhushan removed with his wife and children But how was he to dispose of his share of his old paternal house? Personally he did not mind his brother having the whole house to himself But he was not his own master, so he one day asked his wife

Pramada looked up into her husband's face as if to try to read his thoughts. "I should like to know first what you think," she said, smiling

"Why," said Sasibhushan, looking away, as if he dared not look his wife in the face, "I think of giving up my share of the house to Bidhu I think we can well afford to spare it now that we have got a house of our own."

Just as he said this, he turned his eyes to his wife, and observed a cloud in her face where a moment ago there was not a trace of it Sasibhushan was afraid that there might be trouble, and hastened to mend his speech. "Why, my dear," he said, "I only meant to consult you on the matter You know I am always ready to follow your advice in everything"

"You are quite at liberty to do as you like," said Pramada. "I have nothing to say to you."

"I have always valued your advice, my dear But let us drop the matter now. We will talk it over another time."

CHAPTER XVI.

NILKAMAL TELLS A STORY TO SHOW THAT ALL THINGS HAPPEN BY FATE

WE now return to Bidhubhushan and Nilkamal The reader must remember that we left them at a village shop There they passed that night Early next morning they got up and resumed their journey. They travelled on in silence for some time , and then, fatigued, they went and sat down under the shade of a tree a little way off the road Nilkamal looked rather sad, although he had appeared jolly enough the night before, and had sung a great deal. Bidhubhushan had more than once felt inclined to talk to him on the way, but had abstained for fear Nilkamal might think of his favourite song again, of which he had already begun to tire Now, as they sat smoking, Bidhu asked, "What ails you, Nilkamal ? "

Nilkamal said nothing. After a brief pause Bidhu repeated his query

Without answering his question, Nilkamal said, "Good sir, do Christian missionaries always do what they say ? "

"What do Christian missionaries say, Nilkamal ? "

"Is it a fact that whoever becomes a Christian has a *bibi* (a European girl) given him for his wife ? "

"I don't know, but if it be a fact, would you like to become a Christian?" said Bidhu, with a laugh

"If it is a fact, it would be a great inducement I can tell you. But do you know the Brahma missionaries have handsome young girls to give in marriage to those who enter their religion?"

"I don't know," said Bidhu

"But I should like to marry a *bibi* rather than a Brahma girl *Bibis* are very pretty indeed I prefer the colour of their skin, and then just think of their dress."

"Well," said Bidhu, "if you get a European for your wife, how are you to support her?"

"Ah, there's the difficulty I have been thinking of that But who knows but I may be able to make a fortune in a little time"

"Who knows, indeed?"

When they had sufficiently rested their feet, they rose and resumed their journey Nilkamal again relapsed into a kind of moody silence After a while, however, he very seriously said, "If I am destined to marry a European girl it must be so, for all things are ordered by fate, you know. There is a pretty story about it I will tell it to you.

"Once upon a time," began Nilkamal, "there lived in a village a Brahman, who had a wife and an only child, a boy One night, as he lay awake in bed, his wife and child being asleep near him, he thought he saw a rope hanging just before his eyes He minded it not, and turned upon his side and tried to fall asleep. But slumber came not to him, and again opening his eyes, there he once more saw the rope This time it seemed to be a little nearer to the ground. 'It must be the

mice,' said he to himself. But as he looked again, lo! the rope turned into a snake; and, before the Brahman could rouse his wife, the snake descended and bit the mother and child, who died instantly. The Brahman stood amazed and horrified at this He saw the snake glide away through an opening in the door, and followed it At daybreak it took the form of a tiger and sprang upon a peasant on the roadside The tiger then changed itself into a bull and gored a boy to death Shortly afterwards the bull assumed the form of an old man who was so bent with age that he could hardly walk. The Brahman, who had observed all this from a little distance, now came forward, and throwing himself at the old man's feet, 'Oh,' said he, 'do tell me who you are' At first the old man would not tell him who he was, but, as the Brahman was persistent and would take no refusal, he said at last, 'I am *Karmasutra* My mission is to take the life of a man as he is fated to lose it'—'Do tell me then,' said the Brahman, 'how I am to die' The old man positively refused to tell him that, but, as the Brahman would not quit hold of his feet until he was told what he wanted to know, he very reluctantly said, 'Know then that you will be devoured by a crocodile.'

"When the Brahman knew what he wanted, he felt it was no longer safe for him to live near the water So on he went toward the east, intending to be as far as he could from the river which flowed past his native village, to which he now no longer had any inducement to return, having lost those who were nearest and dearest to him on earth. After several days' journey he passed the jurisdiction of one raja and entered that of another, where some one was kind enough to let him lodge in his house.

"Now, the raja of the country to which he had come had no children. And the Brahman went to him and asked his permission to do for him certain things, which would ensure a son being born to him

"The raja complied with his request And in a year's time, the rani, his wife, presented him with a boy as beautiful as the morning star

"Now, the raja was so pleased that, instead of dismissing the Brahman with money, he wished him to stay, and the latter thankfully accepted his offer. When the little prince was old enough to learn, he became his tutor. And, when the Brahman had taught him all he knew himself, it was arranged that the young prince should go and visit foreign lands The raja's son offered to take his tutor with him and to this the Brahman consented, but said that he would not go near a river Being asked why, he told his pupil the reason; and the young man laughed at it as altogether idle, though he said that he should be allowed to have his own way

"Accompanied by his tutor, the prince travelled through foreign countries, and at last expressed his desire to go to the Ganges to bathe. The Brahman of course refused to go with him; but, said the youth, 'Why, sir, you are not going to be seized by a crocodile on land, that's certain. What could the Brahman do? He felt it was useless to refuse any longer, and so he went

"The young prince came to a town on the Ganges and took a suitable house Now, there was a *yoga*[1] at hand, and for two or three days men and women had kept pouring in crowds from various places, far and near, to perform the sacred ceremony of ablution. And, when the day came on which the prince was to

[1] A favourable conjunction of certain planets

bathe, the Brahman, on being asked, expressly refused to go with him. But at length the young man persuaded him, saying that he need have no reason to be anxious for his safety, as he was not to enter the water, but only to keep on the landing and dictate the ceremonial prayers When they had reached the riverside, the sight of numerous people bathing together emboldened the Brahman to come down to the landing and dictate the words of prayer But, as his pupil could not hear him for the hubbub, he bade him come nearer to him, saying that his men would stand around him with drawn swords The Brahman did as he was asked, when the attendants immediately formed a ring around him. But when he had done dictating the usual prayers, 'I am the same *Karmasutra*,' cried the prince, and instantly changing himself into a crocodile threw him down and carried him off at one bound."

"It is a strange story," said Bidhu, when Nilkamal had finished. After a while they came to a shop on the way

"Friend shopkeeper," said Nilkamal, stepping up, "did you lodge two Brahmas in your shop?"

"Why, what do you mean by asking that?" said Bidhu.

"I just want to ask those fellows that question—the one that I asked you on the road"

"Brahmans did you say, sir?" said the shopkeeper.

"No, Brahmas," said Nilkamal.

"Brahmas? That's a queer name; but I am sure there have been two Brahmans here"

Nilkamal said no more. He looked rather disappointed Bidhu was quite tired, and proposed that they should pass that night there.

CHAPTER XVII.

"CALCUTTA IS SUCH A DIRTY PLACE"

NEXT morning at sunrise Bidhu and Nilkamal resumed their journey They had travelled a long distance and were now near Calcutta And, as they went on, they were cheered by the prospect of quickly finding themselves in the great city where they were to try their fortune Nilkamal knew nothing of Calcutta, and asked his companion what it was like

"Very unlike anything you have ever seen, to be sure But what do you mean? Do you mean how large is it or what?"

"I should like to know enough to have some idea of the place," said Nilkamal "What colour is the clay there?"

"Why, I am sure it is the same as in your Ramnagar," said Bidhu, laughing aloud at this question

"But they say that Calcutta is a very large town. I don't understand that."

"Well, that means that Calcutta is many times as big as your native village. There are big bazaars and countless shops and countless people there."

"Are there more people in Calcutta than are assembled in our market on fair days?"

"Oh, infinitely more than you can have an idea of Nowhere in this country are there more people than in Calcutta"

"Well, what days are market days there?"

"Markets! No such thing in Calcutta. There every day the people can buy whatever they want, for, as I have told you, there are shops out of number, and of all descriptions Besides in every part of the town there is a bazaar which is crowded with buyers every day"

"But I wonder how all these shops and bazaars can have so many buyers every day. Our market is not held every day We buy only two days in the week"

"Be quiet now," said Bidhu "You will see by and by why there are customers every day"

They went on in silence for some minutes, and then Nilkamal, still wondering where such numbers of buyers came from, referred the question for solution to his companion

"Don't prattle, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, in a rather rebuking tone. "I will never again answer your queries, if you don't hold your tongue when I tell you"

There was silence again for a good half hour. When they were within a mile of Calcutta, seeing a number of people pass, Nilkamal could hardly resist the temptation to ask where these people might be going to, and whether they were going to a play.

"Nonsense," said Bidhu. "Don't you see we are very near Calcutta?"

"Are these people then going to Calcutta?" inquired Nilkamal.

"Yes," said Bidhu, rather dryly.

There was another long pause, and it was not broken until they had entered the town and neared Syambazar.

"O good sir, what's that over there?" cried Nilkamal in astonishment, as his curious eye caught sight of a hackney coach that moved rapidly towards them with a rattling noise.

"Have you never seen a horse carriage before?" said Bidhu, with a laugh

"Why, I have seen Rohimbox's carriage. I have seen many other carriages too"

"I don't mean a bullock cart Have you never seen a horse carriage?"

"A horse carriage? Is that a horse carriage?"

"Why, have you never been to Krishnagar? There are many horse carriages there"

"I am sure there are, but I never knew that a horse carriage was different from a bullock carriage."

Thus talking they crossed the canal by the Syambazar bridge Just then more carriages drove up, and wheeled quickly past them

"Look! look! one, two, three," exclaimed Nilkamal in ecstasy.

Nilkamal's eyes wandered from the road and he looked about him in surprise Just then another coach drove up from behind, and was about to run over him, when the driver, calling out to him to get out of the way, gave him a quick sharp cut with his whip Smarting with the pain, he looked behind as he uttered a loud scream, and ran to one side of the road.

"How awkward of you, Nilkamal!" cried Bidhu. "Why, man, you have had a narrow escape This is not your Ramnagar. Here you are like to risk your

life at every step, if you don't have your eyes about you"

Nilkamal had his skin cut in two places; and he was so afraid for his safety that he determined to stick close to his companion and not to be separated from him for a moment. Bidhu, however, persuaded him out of it by making him clearly understand that it was not safe for them to walk side by side, but that he would do well to keep just behind and let him lead the way

"Come on," said Bidhu, as Nilkamal stopped to look at a fine horse on the way, "and don't be staring at everything you see"

Though Bidhu had never been to Calcutta before, as he had more than once been to Krishnagar, nothing seemed strange or new to him.

"Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they walked along, "let us go to Kalighat. It is a quieter place; and besides, I think, we ought first to visit it, as it is a holy place to which people come from every part of the country to pay their worship to the goddess."

"Let us go by all means," said Nilkamal, who still felt a smart from the cut he had got. "I have no wish to stay here. Calcutta is such a dirty place There's a filthy odour in the air everywhere And in the street one must have one's eyes about him, lest he should get a cut or be driven over"

"Kalighat," said Bidhu, "is just south of Calcutta. We shall have to keep straight on in the direction we are going"

"There are such numbers of beggars there"

"Yes," said Bidhu. "And they are the most importunate set of beggars."

"The *Kalibari*,"[1] said Nilkamal, "is not such a safe place as one may think it. It is easy to get into it, but to get out of it again with a whole skin—there's the rub."

"No fear of that," said Bidhu "You are safe, while you are with me"

[1] A temple erected to the Goddess Kali

CHAPTER XVIII

SEPARATION OF BIDHU AND NILKAMAL

BIDHU and Nilkamal went on and on towards the south, till they came to the bazaar at Bhowanipur. "This is Kalighat, I think," said Bidhu. "Will you just inquire, Nilkamal?"

"Where is the temple, please?" Nilkamal asked a passer-by

The man asked was a Dacca man, who was a rice merchant. It is not the way with a man of East Bengal to readily answer a question that one may ask in passing Instead of obliging him by telling him directly what he wants to know, he is always sure to tire his patience with a number of questions which he has no business to ask

"Where do you come from?" he asked Nilkamal, with an intonation such as is peculiar to people of East Bengal, without answering his question.

"Krishnagar," replied Nilkamal.

"Were you ever in Calcutta before?"

"I wouldn't ask you if I had been."

"Whither are you going?"

"What impertinence is this!" exclaimed Bidhu, who lacked patience, being greatly incommoded with heat and hunger and fatigue.

"Here is a nabob's grandson, I see," said the Dacca man, being offended "Why, you are such a good-tempered fellow that I think I ought to walk all the way with you to show you the temple Find out as you best can I won't help you"

"We don't care a straw for your help," said Bidhu-bhushan, as the Dacca man turned to pursue his way. "Come along, Nilkamal, we can find our way to the temple ourselves"

Walking a little distance, Bidhu thought it was foolish to be out of temper with any one on the road, when, on looking forward they noticed a Brahman, with a garland of sacred flowers hanging from his neck, and his forehead well besmeared with vermilion, coming apace towards them. They stopped for him to come up, and then Bidhu asked, "Will you kindly direct us to the temple?"

"I am going there, my friend," said he, smiling and taking hold of Bidhu's hand in a familiar way. "I shall be very glad to take you there"

Bidhu thanked him kindly for so goodnaturedly offering, as he thought, to be their guide

The Brahman was a guide from the temple as Bidhu soon afterwards discovered. He was very glad to have found what he had been eagerly on the lookout for. And now he walked along with them, talking and laughing merrily like an old acquaintance.

On getting to Kalighat, Bidhu and Nilkamal went to bathe in the Adiganga. Nilkamal was filled with disgust at the sight of the filth and refuse floating all over on its muddy waters. "I fail to see," said he, "why people like to bathe in it. I much prefer the river at Hanskhali, for there one need have no fear of having

one's feet stuck deep in the mire, and, except during the rains, the water is sufficiently clear at all seasons"—"Don't disparage it, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, as they both entered the water. "This holy river has helped numbers to go to heaven, and we may go to heaven as well, if only we have faith like them."

Like two agreeable companions they talked as they bathed, and then they went to pay their adoration to the goddess, with the guide who had never left them for a minute walking before to lead the way Nilkamal was not very pleased on seeing the temple, and great indeed was his disappointment when he looked upon the idol itself "I will swear," said he, "the man who fashioned it did not at all understand his business" He was about to make other remarks, but just then Bidhu said, "Hush, Nilkamal! spare your criticisms now, you have enough to do to mind what you are about."

However, having paid their worship, Bidhu and Nilkamal were coming away, when they were stopped at the door by a lean sinister-looking Brahmin demanding to be paid his due.

"What is there to pay?" Bidhu asked.

"The least to pay is eight annas, but if you can pay more, so much the better for you and for us too"

Bidhu untied the string of his purse, secured about his waist, and taking out a four-anna bit put it into the fellow's hand.

Nilkamal was coming away without paying anything, and when he was stopped, he readily answered that he was but the servant of the babu, upon which he was allowed to pass.

They had scarcely gone fifty steps from the door of

the temple, when they were stopped again by their guide, who now stretched out his hand, demanding to be paid in his turn.

"I have paid at the door," said Bidhu. "Why should I pay again ?"

"I have nothing to do with that Where is my reward for the service I have done you ?"

Without another word Bidhu took out another four-anna bit, and had just put it into the man's hand, when some fifty persons, men and women, with clusters of garlands in their hands, made a rush towards them Before the two travellers knew it, they came quickly around them, so as to effectually cut off their escape Then in a moment they rushed to put garlands on their necks and to daub their foreheads with vermilion And the rabble pressed so close around and upon them, making vociferous demands and uttering loud benedictions, that they found it hard work to get away Whichever way they attempted to move they were pulled from the opposite side, and the clamour and confusion were such indeed that one who has never been there can scarcely picture the scene to himself

Bidhu was soon quite tired of them, and wanting to be rid of them anyhow, he felt for his purse; but, to his great surprise, he found it was missing. In deep distress he cried to his companion, "I have been robbed, Nilkamal; oh! I have been robbed of my money."

Nilkamal, too intent on how he could best make his escape to hear him properly, cried, "Help, help, master, I swear these fellows will be the death of me."

In fact, Nilkamal was in a more woful situation than Bidhu He had his face so daubed with vermilion that he could hardly be recognised. For, though everyone

wanted to get at his forehead, there were many who missed it, and thus he received the colour in every possible part of his face Some one chanced to run his finger into one of his eyes, which nearly blinded him. He was heavily loaded with garlands With loud appeals to their mercy he begged the people to desist from their mad course and let him go, as he had not so much as a pice about him.

With great difficulty did Bidhu and Nilkamal at last succeed in getting away. On gaining the street they met, on looking around, an upcountry-man in just the same predicament as they had been in. Pointing behind, with looks which bespoke terror, Nilkamal cried, "Oh, here they come again. I will not stop one moment longer" And he took to his heels, leaving his companion to shift for himself as best he could. But just as he ran off, a hue-and-cry was raised after him A number of men chased him with the cry of "Stop the man." Nilkamal ran for his life; and as he scudded away at a rapid pace, more and more men echoed the cry and joined in the pursuit. But his legs soon failed him He had walked for three whole days and had eaten nothing since that morning. As he came to a turn in the street he was quite exhausted, and his legs giving way, down he came to the ground. Soon his pursuers were around him; but not one of them knew why he had run after him. Nilkamal was like a desperate man now. "Come," he cried, "put all your stock of garlands on me. I have nearly lost one eye, and I don't care at all if I lose the other." At these words, which seemed to have no meaning, the men took him for a mad man and went away laughing.

Nilkamal's eye was very painful now, and the water

flowed from it. Besides he had his skin cut and torn in more places than one on account of the bad tumble he had got. He sat there for a while, and then rising to his feet and dusting himself he turned to go to Bidhu. But he soon found that he had lost his way. During all that evening he tried in vain to find his way back to the temple, and at length got so tired that his legs could carry him no longer. Dragging himself along he sank down at the door of a house. And as he sat there and thought of his own forlorn condition he wept like a child.

"Who are you?" asked a voice, when he had sat there for a good half hour. The voice that inquired was that of the master of the house, who, seeing a strange man at the door on his return from his office, stopped to make an inquiry before entering.

"I am Nilkamal," said Nilkamal, crying and sobbing like a child.

"Why do you cry?" asked the master of the house.

"I have lost my way," said Nilkamal, still crying.

"Lost your way? How is that?"

Nilkamal now ceased weeping, and brushing away his tears gave an account of himself.

The babu took compassion on him, and entering kindly welcomed him into his house.

"Wait here," said he, showing him into a room, "till I bring you something to eat."

After he had eaten something Nilkamal felt much refreshed; and then he longed to tell the master of the house, as he thought it would greatly please him, that he could play well on his fiddle.

"Will you then just give us some proof of your skill?" said the babu, when he knew that he was a good player.

Nilkamal at once took up his fiddle, but just as he removed the rag in which it was carefully wrapped, he suddenly exclaimed in a tone of deep regret, "What do I see! my instrument gone, and thus I am deprived of the only solace and comfort of my life!" As he uttered these words, he shed a flood of tears, for indeed he was pained beyond all measure to find his violin broken in two or three places and utterly useless

The babu did really sympathise with him in his grief and kindly promised him a new one.

This somewhat comforted Nilkamal "I am very thankful, sir," said he, "but I am sure I can never get one like that I have lost"

The babu, however, said, "You can go with me to the bazaar, Nilkamal, and choose one for yourself" After a while Nilkamal was called to supper. He was afterwards very kindly supplied with a bed to sleep on; and as he stood much in need of rest, he went to bed and quickly fell asleep

To return to Bidhubhushan. The loss of his purse weighed heavily upon his heart. He was amazed and almost horrified to see poor Nilkamal hunted by a number of men on the road, and for no earthly reason that he could guess He wished he had not come there and was sorry he had done so. Through grief and hunger and fatigue he lost all heart and burst into tears. And as he turned his weary steps in the direction of the river he met the very man who had been his guide, and asked him where he might be supplied with food and shelter for the night. "You need not be troubled about that," said he. "Come on with me to the temple, and I will get you some of the food presented to the goddess by the worshippers." Bidhu followed him

thither, and there he waited for the food till it was ready for distribution among the people After he had partaken of it, he went and laid him down in a corner of the temple to sleep

Early next morning Bidhu rose and went to bathe He afterwards went and waited in the corner where he had slept during the past night He never exchanged a word with anybody, and nobody cared to look at him, much less to talk to him In the end, however, he got tired of waiting and went to take a turn in the street He knew the hour for the distribution of the food, and when it came, he went and had his share of it Thus he lived on from day to day.

CHAPTER XIX.

BIPRADAS'S WILL.

It was just as Hem had predicted about his sister. By diligent application and perseverance, while her brother was away, Svarnalata soon made fair progress in reading and writing, and at length wrote a letter to her brother. Her brother was mightily glad to peruse her letter It was short and simple, and so full of love In it he was reminded of his promise. And so, when he went home, he handed his sister, with a smile, a beautiful flower of gold of delicate workmanship for use as a hair ornament, and she was delighted with her prize. "I am so glad you have won it," he said, putting it on for her, and looking as though he was very proud to think that she was so gentle and loving and intelligent.

Bipradas was out on some business when his son came home But, as Hem was expected, he quickly returned after finishing his business Hearing his son's voice as he entered, he went in full of joy. Svarna ran to her father as soon as she saw him. "I have got a prize from brother, papa," said Svarna, showing her father the flower of gold. "Look, how fine it is."

Bipradas said nothing. He was perfectly happy in his children. And now he was moved to tears at the

grateful thought that they were so loving and good. A tear also started to Svarna's eye, as she looked up to her father's face Hem stood by looking down on the ground, respecting this outburst of parental love, which now found vent in tears

After some minutes' silence, Bipradas entered into conversation with his son and talked till dinner time

Hem assisted his sister with her lessons as before, and so rapid indeed had been her progress that her brother was astonished Now and then they read interesting stories to each other Their father, resting in bed, often watched them reading or talking together, with feelings of mingled love and gratitude

The holidays were quickly at an end, and Hem must be gone

"I will go down to Calcutta with you," said Bipradas to his son

"Why, father?" asked Hem, looking very pleased

"Oh, I have some business with a lawyer, my son I may tell you that I am going to make a will"

"A will, father?"

"Yes, a will, my son I am now in the decline of life and must think of disposing of my property"

At first Hem was glad his father was going to accompany him, but when he knew why, his cheerfulness left him. He looked so sad; and his father said, "Don't be concerned about my going to make a will" At these words Hem burst into tears. "Come, come," said Bipradas, "why should you thus make yourself miserable, my son? No one need die because he makes his will One may make a will and change it as many times as he wants to. Who knows that I may not have many years of life yet before me."

Hem brushed away the tears from his eyes. On the appointed day he left for Calcutta with his father.

A day or two after his arrival there Bipradas went and took a conveyance to Bhowanipur, to see a friend, a lawyer, who had formerly belonged to their village He soon arrived in his lodgings, and Babu Benoykrishna Ghose (for that was the gentleman's name) gave him a most cordial reception The two conversed together for a while, and then Bipradas said, "I am an old man now and must think of making my will"

"Why, I think that's good," said Benoy babu. "I think I can draft it and have it copied just when you please But how do you wish to divide your money?"

"What I have got I mean to divide equally between my two children"

"Will that not be an injustice to your son? Hem is not going to get a share of his brother-in-law's property when his sister marries'

"Of course, he is not But he may live to make a fortune, he may be very prosperous in life. My father, you know, left me nothing And Svarna—she may be married to a poor man's son, no one knows"

"But how much have you got?"

"That you will know when you draft the will," said Bipradas, with a smile.

Bipradas did not mean to make any long stay that day, so he bade his friend good-bye and returned to his lodgings In a few days again he called on him The will was drawn up and written out on stamped paper. To each of the children was allotted the sum of fifteen thousand rupees in promissory notes. When Hem should have attained to his majority, and Svarna been given away in marriage, they would be entitled to the benefit of the will.

CHAPTER XX.

GADADHAR AND SYAMA.

THOUGH Gadadhar spoke not a word about the disgrace he had been in at the police station, he secretly meditated revenge on Syama and Sarala Pramada also watched for an opportunity to make them pay dearly for their insolence She determined not to pocket the insult timidly like her husband, but she would bring down the pride of the maid-servant, though neither she nor her brother, it must be said, had the courage to attack her openly.

One night Sarala and Syama, after they had taken their food, were in bed talking, and the door was ajar. It was near midnight, and Pramada, choosing her time, walked lightly to the old house in which her sister-in-law lived; then creeping on tiptoe, and looking cautiously about her, she reached the door of Sarala's bed-room and stood listening attentively to the chat that was going on.

"It is nearly three months since your master left home," said Sarala. "It is strange he hasn't sent a line to say how he is doing."

"You needn't be anxious, dear mistress," said Syama "We are not sure he has been staying in the same

place these three months. Perhaps he has got a job in a *jattra* company Possibly, too, he has been waiting for an opportunity to write, and now it may be we shall soon hear from him One cannot write, you know, unless one has sufficient composure of mind for that purpose"

"I think we haven't much left of our small sum," said Sarala.

"What we have left," said Syama, "is likely to support us for six months yet"

"But I don't like your keeping the money in that chest, as it wants a key"

"Why, who will know it wants a key?" said Syama "You may be sure it is as secure there as if we kept it safely locked up"

Pramada did not need to hear any more, so she immediately slunk away. She chuckled over the discovery she had made She thought she would steal the money that very night Would she be caught in the act? She thought she had better not do anything hastily, but consult her mother first.

The next morning after her husband had gone to his work, Pramada told her mother of the important discovery she had made. "Leave it to me, sister," exclaimed Gadadhar, "and I'll be sure to manage it as cleverly as you could wish it."

"Softly, softly, Gadadharchandra," said his mother. Then looking around, and speaking as if the very walls had ears, she said, "For three or four days I have seen them go to bed with the door open. But take care how you put in your nose, my boy, if you find that Syama is awake You well know the risk you run"

"You need fear nothing, mother," said Gadadhar.

"I will take the precaution to smear myself with oil; and if that ugly wench should seize me, why, she can't keep her hold, that's certain"

"Hush!" said Pramada, who was at the door watching, seeing Syama at a distance As Syama came within hearing, she cried to Gadadhar, "You are going now?" —"No, not now, I am going in the evening," cried Gadadhar, taking the hint.

A little before sunset Gadadhar made the announcement that he was going home, and having dressed, left the house. At about eleven o'clock at night he returned. Walking round he slipped into the old house by the back-door which had no latch It was the middle of summer The moon was in the sky There was not a breath of wind, for the night was hot and sultry Sarala and Syama had gone to bed, leaving the door open Between them Gopal was sleeping quietly Gadadhar waited till all was still, then, taking his opportunity, he slily entered the room, and having stolen the money, made off with it.

He hurried on and did not stop until he reached his house The next morning he returned to his sister On the way he wondered if they had missed the money He was glad when he found that they had not That day, as Sarala did not require any money, there was no occasion for opening the chest, and hence the money was not missed.

Next day, when going to lessons, Gopal asked his mother for his school fee, telling her how his teacher had bade him take care not to forget it. Sarala was busy cooking at the time, so she called to Syama and asked her to let Gopal have the money On opening the chest, Syama, not finding the savings where they should have

been, thought that Sarala was joking, and had put the money elsewhere.

"Why, now, this is a good joke indeed," cried Syama "Come, tell me, mistress, where you have put the money"

"O Syama, what do you mean?" exclaimed Sarala, with surprise.

"I mean what I say," said Syama, rather jocularly. "Now leave off joking and don't let us keep Gopal waiting for nothing"

"Oh, I am not joking, Syama I haven't meddled with the chest these two or three days, but you surprise me"

Her looks and manner of speaking plainly showed that she was really serious It seemed certain that the money was gone They, however, both searched for it in the chest and all over the room, but it was nowhere to be found In deep despair Sarala sank down on the floor. "Oh! what shall we do now?" she cried.

"As sure as I live," exclaimed Syama, "it is that cursed rascal of a Brahman who has stolen the money Now I see why he suddenly went home the other day. It was only to avoid suspicion Surely that very day he returned and stole the money. I remember they were talking together rather guardedly, and when I came near enough to them, they began to speak aloud so that I mightn't suspect anything I will go to the police." And Syama bustled out of the room.

For two days Pramada and her mother and brother had been watching and expecting a fuss to be made about the lost money; and now they heard it, they laughed in their sleeve and very much enjoyed the trouble Sarala and Syama were in

"Gadadhar has stolen our money," cried Syama, stopping as she heard whispers in Pramada's room "Let him produce the money, I say, or I will call in police."

"Charge me with theft, you insolent hussy!" cried Gadadhar, coming out. "I will go to the police I will bring you down"

"Not you," cried Syama "Didn't you go to the police station the other day? Didn't you?"

Gadadhar thought at once that Syama had heard of the disgrace he had been in when there, and retreated crestfallen.

As he re-entered his sister's room, Syama continued, "Yes, you did; and what then? The police found you to be an idiot and sent you away I will go and inform the police, and I will not spare your accomplices" Upon this Syama bustled out of the house She had not gone far when Sasibhushan, meeting her on his way home, and suspecting by her looks that there was something wrong, inquired, "What's the matter now, Syama?"

"Gadadhar has stolen our money," said Syama, as she stopped, "and I am going to the police"

"There is no haste," said Sasibhushan. "You must let me inquire into the matter before you go to them Now follow me."

Syama obeyed. When Sasibhushan had heard all from her, he made no remarks, but only put a rupee into her hand, saying, "You can pay Gopal's school fee out of this money now, but I must inquire further into the matter"

After eating his meal, Sasibhushan talked with his wife for some time and grew very suspicious But he

dared not say anything to her for fear of giving offence. When he was ready for work again he called Syama and said, "There is no very strong evidence against Gadadhar; but I will pay the money rather than you should make a fuss by calling in the police."

On his return from work Sasibhushan called Syama again and counted out the money to her.

CHAPTER XXI

GOPAL FINDS A NEW MOTHER

IN the mornings and in the afternoons Gopal attended school at the house of Ramchandra Ghose This gentleman, who lived a little way off from Bidhubhushan's house, had allowed the use of his *chandimandap* [1] for the instruction of the little boys of the village There were some sixty boys on the roll, and as they all squatted on the floor, each on his little square mat, noisily engaged in writing and ciphering, according to their different progress, on palm leaves, plantain leaves and paper, the master, the prominent figure in the whole group, seated in the midst of them, now and then struck the rod on the floor as he thundered, "Louder, boys, louder"

The boys, for the most part, were often at their loudest. Such as were in the palm-leaf class used bamboo pens. And they wrote, often making blots, and wiping out the ink with their fingers, rubbing the fingers on their heads or on their *dhutis* There were others, little fellows, newly initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing, wallowing in blots and daubing themselves with ink up to the very roots of their hair. If any one of these by accident formed a letter properly,

[1] House of the Goddess Chandi.

he immediately smeared it out again with his arm in his preparations to make another The writers on plantain leaves, who were more advanced, worked at arithmetic or spelt proper names, with a drawling and half nasal sound as they wrote them But the most advanced were the writers on paper, who wrote a bold hand and solved difficult problems in arithmetic They wrote with reed pens, and kept up a sort of humming noise as they copied, each with an eye to neatness, forms of agreements, accounts, and contracts, the paper used by them being extremely rough, and such as could be had at a very cheap price. The teacher, who was a hard smoker, was generally believed to be more fond of caning than teaching his pupils

"Why are you late?" demanded he, in a voice like thunder, which made the boys at once start and look up to see who had come in, as one day a boy, whose name was Nidhiram, showed himself in the school at a somewhat late hour, carrying his mat in a long roll under his arm, with the palm leaves sticking out at one end, and his ink-pot suspended from strings

"Come up, you little rogue," was the command of the formidable village preceptor, as he took up the rod at the same instant.

The master was not to be disobeyed Slowly and timidly the poor boy moved up and stood before the judgment seat

"You dog! do you choose this hour for coming to school?" said the schoolmaster, shaking the rod as he rose from his seat.

"Please, sir," said Nidhiram, who trembled in every limb, as he expected the rod to descend on his head each moment, "I have been preparing the tobacco

father brought from market this morning, as I wished to take you some of it"

"Oh, then I must test your tobacco," said the master, resuming his seat and handing his *chillum* to Nidhiram "Now, fill it. If I like your tobacco, I may spare the rod, but if I do not, I will make it fly to pieces on your back"

Coming away to do his bidding, and first leaving his bundle of palm leaves and his ink-pot in their usual place, Nidhiram stopped to draw a long and luxurious breath of relief. When the *chillum* had been got ready, he gave it two or three pulls on the sly, relishing them as one newly initiated into smoking would do, and then returned to the master, never doubting but that he would approve of the tobacco Unfortunately for Nidhiram, however, the tobacco proved not to his liking, and, as the poor boy was going to sit down quietly in his place, the master cried, "So you have brought this worthless tobacco for me? Come up, you puppy"

Nidhiram's stars were evidently now against him. The poor boy, however, approached the dreaded seat, and stood pleading that he was not to blame, as it was not he but his father who had brought the tobacco; but the master would not listen to reason, and quickly enough saved him the trouble of proving his innocence by inflicting five or six cuts on his head and back, which sent him smarting and yelling to his seat.

Having flogged Nidhiram, he assumed a look of imperturbable gravity. "Now boys, come, bring up your *parvan* (allowance) one by one," he cried, looking around with an air of great dignity.

After the celebration of each festival in the almanac, each boy was to pay his *parvan*, that is one pice as

his mite of contribution for the benefit of the village pedagogue. If any defaulters pleaded as their excuse that their guardians would not pay it, they were taught to get it by theft. The boys, in short, would do anything to please their teacher

Those who had brought their *parvan* went up and paid it one after the other.

"Yours, sir," Gopal was asked, in a somewhat stern voice

"Please, sir," said Gopal, "I will bring it to-morrow"

"Didn't you say that yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, but I quite forgot it"

"Then, it seems, you must have a taste of the rod to make you remember it"

Gopal knew that his mother was not able to pay, yet his horrid dread of flogging made him say that he would bring it without fail "to-morrow," upon which he was let go with the warning, "Take care you don't forget again."

At the end of school hours, Gopal, going home with a boy named Bhuban, said, "Bhuban, would you please lend me a pice? I have promised to pay to-morrow, and if I fail you know what I must expect." And the poor boy shuddered at the very thought of it.

"Why not get it from your mother?" said Bhuban.

"If mother could pay, I wouldn't want to borrow from you."

"Then you can pay out of your lunch money"

"Oh, I get nothing of the sort."

"You don't eat your lunch?"

"No"

"What do you take after going home from school? What are you going to eat to-day? You must be very hungry now."

"I don't know If there is anything, mother will let me have it. But I often go without lunch, and I don't mind it."

Bhuban was pained to hear his companion talk thus, and he said again, "You never ask your mother for it?"

"No, I mustn't, for then I should only distress her, and I would suffer anything rather than grieve my mother's heart. Oh, my poor mother! I cannot bear to see her weep. One day Bepin and I went home together Bepin had his lunch, mother had nothing to give me, so she sat down and wept as though her heart would break After that I never liked to walk home with Bepin I always wait and linger by the way just to let Bepin have time to get home before me and eat his lunch, and then I follow him home and play with him" And the poor boy drew his hand quickly across his eyes.

"Bepin never likes to share his lunch with you?" said Bhuban, now greatly sympathising with his companion

"Bepin is willing, but aunt will not allow it She makes him eat his in her presence"

"Do please walk home with me I will share my lunch with you, and then I can get you a pice from mother."

"No, don't ask your mother. You can lend it yourself if you like"

"All right, come along."

The two boys walked on in silence, and as soon as Bhuban got home, he went and told his mother all about Gopal

The good woman at once stepped out with her son,

and noticing Gopal's sad look, took him by both hands and said, "My child, you have come together from school, and *you* are waiting at the door!" She led him in with great kindness, and, making him sit down, gave him and her boy some sweetmeats, and water in two small drinking vessels

Having done eating, Gopal drank off the water and asked for a little more

"Whom do you ask, child?" said Bhuban's mother.

Gopal modestly replied that he meant her, upon which she said with a smile, "Tell me who I am"

He blushed and hung down his head

"I will not hear you," she said, "unless you say, 'Ma give me a little water.'"

Gopal's lips quivered with emotion as he repeated the words in a rather hoarse voice

Bhuban's mother at once took him up in her arms, and, having kissed his forehead, gave him some water. For a while Gopal could see nothing for his tears Resting his head on her shoulder, he closed his eyes and kept quite still Tears were also in the eyes of Bhuban's mother. They fell plentifully and even wet Gopal's arms

You also are a mother, Pramada!

For a long time she held him in her arms; then, setting him down and taking both his hands in hers she said, "Will you promise, Gopal, to see me every day on your way home from your lessons?"

Gopal very humbly saying that he would do as she wished him, she pressed a rupee into his hand and said, "Go and play now, my child; but let me see you once again before you go home."

CHAPTER XXII.

NILKAMAL AT A *JATTRA*

NILKAMAL was allowed to stay at the gentleman's house at Kalighat, where he earned his meals by making himself useful in the house The babu had kindly bought him a new fiddle, and over it Nilkamal screeched in his leisure time regularly after mid-day. Whenever any one inquired of the babu about Nilkamal, before the babu could reply, Nilkamal would readily say that he was a musician, at which the babu would only smile

Nilkamal often inquired of hawkers passing by the door if they knew of a play being performed anywhere No hawker, once asked, would pay heed to his words again. Nilkamal thought that hawkers who went to every house ought to have all the news Weeks passed, and he could get no information. He wanted so much to go to a play that he could think of nothing else, and he often dreamed or talked of it in his sleep at night. Much as he wished to go about for the information he so earnestly desired, he dared not leave the house for fear of losing his way.

One morning Nilkamal was smoking his hookah when the babu called, "Nilkamal, Nilkamal."

Nilkamal was quite lost in the one thought that was

constantly uppermost in his mind, and consequently did not hear the babu

The babu walked up to his room and called again. Nilkamal turned with a start, and, seeing that the babu had on his walking suit, inquired, "Where are you going, sir?"

"Going to a *jattra* I hear you want very much to see one, and I wish you to go with me"

Nilkamal eagerly clutched at the proposal Assuring the babu that he felt very thankful, he put away his hookah and *chillum*, and was ready in a minute to follow him out of the house.

"Where is the performance?" Nilkamal asked, as leaving his house the babu took the road leading to the temple

"A little way off, near the temple."

"Very close to the *temple* do you say, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply

"Then I am not going, sir," said Nilkamal, in a rather decided tone.

"Not going? Why not?" asked the babu.

"Because I have not eyes of stone in my head, sir."

"Well, what do you mean by that?"

Nilkamal briefly related his troubles in and out of the courtyard of the temple, and concluded by saying that he wished his eyes had been made of stone instead of flesh, as then he would not be afraid

"But I assure you," said the babu, laughing, "you are quite safe while you are with me."

"Why, hadn't I the same assurance from my friend?"

"Your companion, like yourself, being fresh from the

country has as much need of help himself as you have. But I assure you, you are quite safe in going with me"

Nilkamal, as the reader can easily think, did not require much persuasion to go On finding himself in the house where the play was going on, he was struck with admiration at the dazzling splendour of the chandeliers suspended overhead by cords, in which here and there a few flickering lights were still allowed to burn, shedding a pale lustre around His eyes were now never at rest At one moment they looked on the swarming crowds around, then at the actors, and at other times wandered among the pictures, with which the walls and pillars were decorated He bored the babu with no end of questions, to the great disturbance and annoyance of those sitting near him

After waiting about an hour and a half, the babu said to Nilkamal, "I want to be going now Do you?"

"No," said Nilkamal, "I mean to wait till the end."

"Just as you please," said the babu "I cannot wait any longer, as it is getting late, and I have to attend my office"

With these words the babu was about to leave when he turned and said to Nilkamal, "Do you think you can find your way back?"

"If I cannot, I can ask," said Nilkamal.

"Where will you ask for?"

"For the babu's house."

"What babu?"

"Why, the babu who goes to his office."

"Nonsense," said the babu, laughing "How is any one to know whom you mean unless you give the name of the person you want?"

"For whom am I to ask then?"

"Ask to be directed to Rameswara babu's house."

"Rameswara?"

"Yes, that's my name," said the babu. "Now, don't forget it"

When the babu had said that, he left him; and Nilkamal tried hard to remember his name, going over it again and again till he had mastered his lesson. He next wanted to know the name of the head of the *jattra* company, and asked one who stood close by with his back turned towards him Failing, however, to draw his attention, he gave him a squeeze such as made him at once turn round in pain, crying out, "Who is that?"

"I only wanted to know the name of the manager of the company," said Nilkamal

"What do you mean by pinching me like that?" said the man, angrily

"Have I hurt you? You can pinch me if you like. But I meant you no harm, I can tell you."

Just at this time an upcountryman stood up and bade them all be quiet

Nilkamal now dared not ask anyone else. He looked anxiously around, when two men rose to leave, and, as they passed by him, one said to the other, "Govinda Adhicari has lost the charm of his name." As Nilkamal heard that remark he thought within himself, "Ah! my old friend, Govinda Adhicari. A lucky chance has once more put me in his way. I will watch him, and if by any chance his eyes meet mine, I shall give him a nod of recognition, and he will be sure to sign to me to come up The fellow here, who was just now in a passion with me, will then know what I am worth."

Nilkamal watched Govinda Adhicari for a long time until tired, he turned and twisted and coughed so as to attract his attention, and would have continued these operations for some time, but just then the play broke up, and there was a rush of people leaving Nilkamal then went up and took his seat among the players.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BIDHUBHUSHAN JOINS A PANCHALI PARTY

AFTER a few days' stay at Kalighat, Bidhubhushan's mind was made up to seek employment in a company of players. But luck, it seemed, was against him. For though he tried hard to secure some such engagement, he had nothing but disappointment for his pains. He continued to have his meals as before, but his clothes were now so dirty that he felt ashamed to go out in them. His friend, the guide, would have had him follow his occupation, but he could not fancy it, for he wanted to do something by which he could get his living honestly.

One day as Bidhubhushan was alone with his melancholy thoughts, he said to himself, "What a hard life is mine! Hard enough to try, not infrequently, the best of us. My health is impaired, my spirits are damped by disappointment. And these dirty rags—do they not speak against me, and make me perhaps as worthless as a beggar in the eyes of one who never had to feel the pinch of hunger? But what has become of poor Nil-kamal? How strange was the circumstance that caused our separation! Poor Sarala! had she been married to another, she might have been happier." The thought of his wife moved him deeply; tears gushed



down his cheeks But soon his looks changed to an expression of anger as the thought of his brother and sister-in-law crossed his mind His lips were compressed, his hands clenched with spasmodic violence His face, however, relaxed as he thought of Gadadhar and his mother, and then there came a smile on his lips

The face is the mirror in which are reflected any feelings that are roused in the heart

Bidhubhushan was so deep in his own thoughts that he did not notice that there was one close by whose eyes were fixed on him This man was no other than his friend, the guide "You seem to be losing your senses!" he said, walking up to Bidhubhushan, having observed fleeting expressions of grief, anger, and pleasure chase one another across his face

Bidhubhushan turned with a start "What?" said he

"I am going to a *panchali*,[1] and I wish you would accompany me."

Bidhubhushan was quickly ready As they walked together, his friend said, "You want to join a company of players?"

"Yes; but it is so hard to get anything, and that makes me feel so miserable, you know"

"I tell you what," said his friend "There is a *panchali* party here from our village They are going to give a public performance to-night Why, man, here is your chance Don't miss it, that's all I can tell you"

"Miss it? Not I But tell me more about it"

[1] A party of singers representing in songs the deeds and amours of the principal characters in Hindu mythology

"Well, I saw the head of the company this morning. He belongs to our village. He wants a man who can play well on the *dhole* I spoke to him about you If he likes you, he will be glad to have you as a partner. 'Bring him over as soon as possible,' were his last words to me when I told him that you were just the man for him Now, don't miss this opportunity"

Bidhubhushan wanted words to express his gratitude His looks, however, told what he could not speak They soon saw the head of the company, and the guide introduced his friend, saying, "Here is the man I spoke to you about"

Bidhubhushan's clothes were so dirty that at first the manager looked as though he would have nothing to do with him But presently he put on a pleasant face, and said, as he reached him a *dhole*, "Let us see what you can do" Bidhubhushan played to the best of his ability The headman was well pleased with his performance, but he was rather cautious in expressing his opinion, and only said, looking very grave, "I think you will do" He next turned to the guide and said, "He accepts our terms?"

"Yes," said Bidhubhushan's friend, "he is willing to join as a partner."

"Well, when would you be able to join?" the headman asked Bidhubhushan.

"Just when you please," said Bidhubhushan

"Why not now, if it suits you? The sooner the better"

"I am ready," said Bidhubhushan

Shortly after Bidhubhushan had joined, fortune began to smile on the company. Even after two or three public performances the company began to be talked of

very highly, and thus they were speedily put in the way of making plenty of money and winning a name for themselves. Their fame soon spread far and wide Bidhubhushan was now a different man from what he had been a short time back His clothes were clean and good, and he had regained his former health and activity Over and above all this he had grown to be very much liked and even respected by the party But for all that his heart yearned for his home How keenly at times he felt the separation from his wife and boy! A great change had by now taken place in Bidhubhushan's character His at one time frivolous nature had been replaced by the staid and sober thoughts of the man The battle of life had aged him and formed his character. To-day a young man is as gay as a butterfly, caring for nothing but pleasure, to-morrow he may be sobered by some sad, unforeseen incident over which he has no control Bidhubhushan had had troubles which had moulded him anew

As soon as Bidhubhushan had received his share of the first night's profits, he sent a letter and some money to his wife As he never had taken any pains to write well, he wasted a deal of paper before he could produce a letter to his satisfaction. The first letter he wrote was rejected because it was not neat enough The second also he destroyed because he did not like the wording of it, and the third he spoiled altogether by spilling the ink over it. The last one to which no accident had happened satisfied him. He read it from beginning to end. How delighted his wife would be to receive his letter His eyes filled with tears as he thought of it

Bidhu then proceeded to get the letter duly registered and posted. After that with what eagerness he awaited

a letter from his wife! He visited the post office daily in the hope of hearing from home. But when more than a week had passed, and there was no letter, he began to be very uneasy. It suddenly occurred to him that his wife did not know how to write, but he thought again that his own boy might, by this time, have learnt to write tolerably well

This thought supported him He would rather live in hope than die in despair. He persistently continued his visits to the post office, till one day the postmaster said to him, "We have had the receipt at last"

"Have you?" eagerly inquired Bidhubhushan

The postmaster showed him the receipt. In distinct letters there was the name Gopalchandra Chatterjee.

For a while Bidhubhushan looked at the signature with a deep and affectionate interest He then asked the postmaster if he could part with the paper

"I am sorry I cannot, sir," said he. "This receipt has to be kept in the office."

Bidhubhushan's eyes were once more bent upon the signature And when at last he took them away, his heart was full and he quickly brushed away the tears from his eyes He, however, felt easy when he left, saying good-bye to the postmaster.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REUNION OF BIDHUBHUSHAN AND NILKAMAL.

THERE was a large programme of entertainments at a religious festival held at Devipur, a village in the district of Hugli. From five o'clock in the afternoon till ten o'clock at night there was a *panchali* The songs were well sung, but what elicited the loudest applause from all was the performance of him who played on the *dhole*

The *dholeman* was Bidhubhushan, who was now the head of the company.

Next there was a *jattra* which commenced a little after midnight There was a large audience Early in the morning Bidhubhushan and his party went to hear it. They arrived just as the music which ushers in a comic character had begun When the band stopped, a little fellow in a satin jacket and pyjamas of chintz stood up and exclaimed, "Hanuman,[1] where are you now? Oh! come and help me" He impersonated Rama, and was thin and very pale, and apparently extremely tired. When he had uttered those words, all noise was hushed into silence, and every-one was on the tiptoe of expectation to see Hanuman

[1] Chief of the monkey heroes who fought for Rama.

appear Hanuman, however, not making his appearance, Rama called again and again till he was hoarse, but there was no response. Poor Rama! he was badly in need of rest But he must have his Hanuman's aid Without him the fight could not go on One of the players rose and quickly left to fetch Hanuman

Now let us follow this man into the green-room and see what is the matter with Hanuman The man selected to play the part of Hanuman is no other than our daft Nilkamal, and how he came to be here is easily told. When he last had an interview with Govinda Adhicari, he had induced that gentleman to get him an appointment But he was good-for-nothing, and Govinda Adhicari, wishing to be rid of him, had him employed where he now was Here he had a salary of four rupees a month, and was more useful in preparing *chillums* of tobacco than in assisting at a play He had never taken part in a play before, but on this occasion, being short of hands, the manager had asked him to play the character of Hanuman Nilkamal was offended. He felt ashamed of appearing in such a part, and though he had the mask and the tail on, he stood fast at the door of the green-room and refused to move a step further

"Come, come, none of your fooleries now," said the manager, rather coaxingly. "You will mar the play if you persist in your obstinacy."

"What do I care for that?" said Nilkamal. "Do you think I am going to act the monkey and be the laughing-stock of the whole assembly? Why, if I must play a part, it should be the part of a hero"

"Nonsense A hero or Hanuman, it is all one to a player Now, come along, do, and don't keep the audience waiting"

"I would rather not stay with you," said Nilkamal, being still held back by shame, which he found it hard to overcome

The manager was perplexed. Rama still kept calling for Hanuman's aid, and he felt that the situation was a most trying and provoking one. At last, in the midst of this dilemma, the manager exclaimed, "Nilkamal, I will raise your pay to five rupees."

Nilkamal was quick to feel the temptation, but he still lingered at the door as though he could hardly get the better of his shame. The manager and his men, however, soon lost all patience, and Nilkamal was forcibly led into the ring. "Ah, what could keep you so long, child," said Rama, addressing Hanuman Hanuman was about to make the answer that was put into his mouth, but looking around his eyes lighted upon Bidhubhushan No one could be more startled at suddenly seeing a serpent than was Nilkamal at the sight of Bidhubhushan. Nilkamal at once thought that Bidhubhushan had probably heard that he had been found good-for-nothing by Govinda Adhicari, and also of his present plight. No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than he felt such shame and humiliation that he told the audience that he had never agreed to personate Hanuman, but had been forced against his will to appear as such

There was a roar of laughter when Nilkamal said this. But raising his voice he continued, "You don't believe me, sirs, but I assure you that what I have said is the truth and nothing but the truth Pray, don't call me Hanuman. My name is Nilkamal."

A deafening laughter again; and Nilkamal sat down from very vexation and shame

"Dear Hanuman!" said Rama, addressing Hanuman.

"Nonsense, I am an honest inhabitant of Ramnagar, and I want the gentlemen around to know it," said Nilkamal.

"My worthy friend, Hanuman," said Rama again, "be good enough to help in the fight"

"What do I care for your fight? What right have you, I say, to call me Hanuman?"

The audience was greatly amused by Hanuman's words, and it was now difficult to restore order By flattery and promises of a considerable increase in his pay, however, Hanuman was at last persuaded to help, but the help was nominal, and the fight was brought to a close by Rama dropping as he took up his bow and arrow But the effect of the play had been completely marred, noise and confusion prevailed, and the manager had to propose that the play should be stopped.

Accordingly, after one or two songs, the play came to an end. When the crowds had dispersed, Bidhubhushan rose and went up to Nilkamal Nilkamal had flung aside the mask and was sullen. "How have you got here, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhushan, sitting down near him

Nilkamal was offended. "I have nothing to say to you, sir," he said, turning his face away.

"What have I done to offend you, Nilkamal?"

"What have you done! How could you laugh, sir? How could *you* who know what I am worth?"

"Oh, I couldn't help it."

"Why, I am not a mad man."

"Who says you are a mad man?"

"I don't want to be among these fellows any longer," said Nilkamal.

"How would you like to make one among us, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhushan "We should be very glad to have you. But what pay do you get here?"

"Six rupees." Nilkamal told him what was not true

Bidhubhushan, who now was the head of the company, said on leaving, "Well, you shall have six rupees a month Get your dues and come over with your things as soon as possible"

Nilkamal now wished he had asked for a little more, thinking how readily Bidhu agreed to let him have six rupees a month

Seeing the manager he said, "Let me have my dues, I will not stay with you"

The manager was greatly displeased with Nilkamal, and was not at all sorry he was going away When he had got his dues, Nilkamal went and got his fiddle and left at once to join the *panchali* party

"I bid you farewell," said Nilkamal, as soon as he saw Bidhubhushan. "I am going off"

"Going off? whither?"

"Anywhere my steps may lead me to"

"Why, aren't you going to join our company, Nilkamal?"

"My mind was made up to go with you, but now I have changed it"

"Why, what has come over you?" inquired Bidhubhushan.

"As I was coming here some rude boys shouted after me, 'Hanuman, Hanuman.' I was so annoyed How I should like to have given them each a good thrashing. But I would rather live among strangers

What guarantee is there you will not call me by that name if I go with you ? "

" Why, Nilkamal, you certainly should know me better than to talk like that "

" Oh, you are very good I know, but what assurance have I that the others will be as good as you ? "

" Depend on me, you have nothing to fear " There was a faint smile on Bidhubhushan's lips as he uttered these words Noticing this, Nilkamal exclaimed,

" Why, now, I see what your assurances are worth."

" I didn't say anything," said Bidhubhushan, looking as serious as he could

" I cannot bear being made game of in that way Come, will you promise never to call me by that name ? "

" I do promise you that "

" But that's not all, you must get your men to promise it too "

" Well, that's easily done " And Bidhubhushan rose and left him Nilkamal now bethought himself of his favourite song, which he kept humming to himself till Bidhubhushan returned. And then, without leaving off singing, he asked him by signs if it was all right

Bidhubhushan looked at him with a smile to find him in such good spirits Nilkamal, however, was quickly offended "You can't blame me, Nilkamal," said Bidhubhushan

" Why ? " asked Nilkamal.

" Do you know what that song refers to ? "

" No, and I don't care "

" Don't be offended, Nilkamal. I will tell you. When Ramchandra fought his enemy, Ravana, who was invincible in arms, he wanted to invoke the aid of

Durga, and sent forth Hanuman to fetch blue lotuses to offer her in worship The song has reference to that."

"Oh, I see, I see," exclaimed Nilkamal, "I will not sing that song any more. But what success had you with the men, my friend?"

"Oh, I easily got them to promise"

"And I promise never to have anything more to do with that song," said Nilkamal, looking very serious.

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT HAS SYAMA DONE?"

AFTER Bidhubhushan's departure from home four years passed, during which Sarala never for a moment forgot her husband Days passed, weeks passed, months passed, and great was her concern for Bidhubhushan One, two, three months, and finally four years had rolled away without even a word from him in whom all her happiness was centered. Many a time and oft Sarala had knelt before the guardian deities of the village to pray for the welfare of her dear husband How many sleepless nights had she spent! What a profusion of tears had she shed! This had gone on for a long time, but at last her health gave way. And then an unwillingness to move due to a dull and depressing feeling of lassitude, possessed her. She was frequently to be seen sitting by herself—a picture of utter hopelessness Her appetite fell away, and she scarcely had any sleep at night. Often at night, even in the very depth of winter, she was bathed in perspiration, the sheets being wet with it But strange to say, the more she sank, as if under a load of weariness, the lovelier seemed her sweet face Though she looked well in the mornings, later in the afternoon her face

was all in a glow, the eyes looking bright and feverish. Slowly but surely Sarala was going into a consumption.

When they had nearly exhausted the savings of Syama, Sarala was very much concerned. With the anxiety in her heart, eating into her vitals, and with Want for her companion, she grew from bad to worse till she was too weak to bear the least exertion of any sort Then was it that Syama became as a mother to Sarala and her child. Each morning, as soon as she was up, her first care was to make them as comfortable as she could, and then she went out in the neighbourhood to earn food for both mother and child When she had fed them, she would go out again to have her own meal Thus did she manage to save the mother and child from starvation

Sasibhushan was now living comfortably with his family in his new house Since moving to it, immediately after its completion, Sarala had often had to stay alone in the old house, and at first was not at all afraid But when at last she had grown so weak as to be confined to her bed, a vague superstitious fear laid hold of her. She fancied she saw a figure approach her bed and look on her with a frown Her weak, unsteady head conjured up other frightful visions before her eyes, and she started in bed Gopal now never left his mother, but always watched by her bedside, with a sad expression on his face.

Sarala started "What did you start at, dear mamma? What ails you?" anxiously inquired Gopal

"Oh, nothing, dear But have you been with me all along?" said Sarala

"Yes, dear mamma How can I leave you now when you seem so unwell?"

"How long have you been here? You won't run out to play, darling?"

"I never play now, mamma"

At times Sarala's memory failed her. When she had spoken these words she closed her eyes and seemed quietly to go to sleep Soon afterwards she woke up again with a start and began to look around eagerly

"What are you looking at, mamma?" said Gopal

"Oh, nothing, my child. Have you been waiting here all the time?"

"Yes, dear mamma I have never left your bed"

"Yes, yes, I quite forgot it," said Sarala, as though she had been roused from a dream. "You haven't had anything to eat, dear?"

"No, mamma, but Syama will soon be back, it is near time"

"Such a good soul! Why, she seems not of this earth, my child Oh, we can never repay her kindness How hard she works for us Out in the morning and back again at noon, then out again and back at dusk Will you promise, Gopal——?"

"Promise what, dear mamma?"

"That you will never forget Syama; that you will always use her kindly when I am gone from this world, child?"

"Oh, dear mamma, how could I do otherwise? She couldn't be kinder if she were my own mother."

Sarala was deeply moved She shut her eyes while tears gently flowed down her cheeks. Gopal affectionately bent over his mother and wiped the rolling tears away "Will you put the pillows one upon the other, darling?" said Sarala, after a while.

Gopal laid the pillows one above the other. "That

will do, dear," said his mother, as supporting herself on her arms she slowly raised herself to a sitting posture. The exertion made her breathe convulsively for over a minute When she had quite got over it, she wished her boy to sit on her lap.

"I can bear it yet," she said. "A few days more and I may be deprived even of that happiness"

Gopal moved not. With eyes looking away from her, which overflowed with tears, he remained perfectly still. His mother drew him fondly to her side, and he rested his head against her bosom and wept in silence.

"Don't be concerned for me, my darling," said Sarala, kissing his tears away and trying to laugh "I shall soon be well How can you think, dearest, your own mother can leave you alone in this world ?"

These words rather increased his pain, and his tears ran the faster now. His mother put her arms round him and kissed him over and over again

Shortly afterwards Syama returned She was simply joyous when for the first time for many days she saw a smile on Sarala's face "You are much better, dear ?" she said, approaching her bed, and sitting down near it. "Why, dear mistress, if you talk to Gopal and take him on your lap every day for a while I will warrant that in a few days you will be your former self again"

"I feel much better to-day, Syama," said Sarala. "Can any one have such a good daughter in Syama and such a good boy as my own Gopal and not feel better ?"

"Why speak you of Syama ? What has Syama done ?" said Syama in her usual blunt way of speaking, as she rose and moved to the door

"Syama has done more than one's own daughter could do," said Sarala. "What more can anyone do ?"

No sooner had she spoken these words than Syama left the room. Syama could never stand by and hear herself being praised She never liked to refer to any act of kindness which she might do What she gave she gave in private. She loved to do her work in a quiet unostentatious way, and expected no reward for it Many men are fond of making a parade of their good deeds They like the papers to talk of them Such good deeds are destined to perish with the papers which record them O Syama, thou best of women, thy good deeds are registered in heaven on imperishable paper, and in characters that will never fade!

CHAPTER XXVI.

SASIBHUSHAN'S NEW HOUSE

IN Sasibhushan's new house Gadadhar had a pretty little outer room for his own use The floor was covered with a valuable carpet, over which was spread a costly sheet with a bolster on it. Right in front of the bolster were the hookahs in their stands, the shells of which were mounted with silver Behind the bolster and close to the wall stood a clothes-horse on which hung two or three fine Simla cloths with coloured borders, two shirts and one scarf. On one side of the clothes-horse, which had on its under-shelf two pair of shoes, was a walking stick resting against the corner, and on the other side there was a rough chest made of the wood of the mango tree

What was the matter with Gadadhar to-day? Why was he at home at this hour? He was one who loved to move in the dark He was a regular night-bird To-day he seemed restless and anxious—something was wrong. Sitting or standing or lying down he could hardly remain in the same position for five minutes Now he sat down, now he rose again and paced impatiently up and down the room He kept putting his head out of the window and looking up and down the path as

though he expected some one. No one, however, appeared. "Hang this business," he said to himself, as he stepped up to the clothes-horse, and taking down a cloth and a shirt, put them on, and then opened the chest and took out a bottle and a glass. Pouring some of the contents of the bottle into the glass, he drank it off at once, making a wry face as he did so. "That wretched Ramdhan! I asked for brandy and he has sent me rum," he muttered between his teeth, as he put the glass aside But did he stop there, because it was rum and not brandy? No He poured out some more of the liquor, and mixing it up with a little water, took it Then he took a third and a fourth glass He felt that it was quite enough for the present, so he corked the bottle again, but, before putting it away, he held it against the light and said, "There is still enough left." He then took his scarf and left, stick in hand.

Gadadhar's room communicated with that of Sasibhushan In a rich man's family, the relations of the master of the house, even the most worthless of them, are all persons of importance. As Gadadhar went on, a man came up and humbly begged a favour of him He, however, dismissed him, saying that, as he was very busy, he must call another time. He had not walked many paces when he met the man he had been most eagerly expecting, coming up the pathway "Hallo! Rames babu," cried Gadadhar, coming quickly up to him. "Right glad am I that you have kept your promise"

"When I gave you my word, I meant to keep it, you know," said Rames

Gadadhar led Rames into his sitting-room. Opening the chest he poured out some more of the liquor and

handed it to Rames, after diluting it, as before, with a little water.

"What is it?" asked Rames, taking the glass in his hand

"Rum," said Gadadhar

"You have put water in it?"

"Yes"

"Then you had better take it yourself," said Rames, handing back the glass "I will take it raw. We, police officers always take it that way you know."

Gadadhar drank that glass himself Rames then poured out some of the liquor for himself and took it raw

As Gadadhar was about to replace the bottle and the glass in the chest, Rames said, 'Why are you putting them away, do you wish me to say good-bye?"

"Oh, no," said Gadadhar, laughing "But there is no harm in using a little precaution, I think We can take them out again when we want them"

"Well, you may do as you like But let me have another glass before you put away the bottle"

Suiting the action to the word Rames filled a second glass for himself and drank it

"Now let us come to the point," said Gadadhar, replacing the bottle and the glass and shutting up the chest

"Well, we, police officers, are men of few words"

Gadadhar was somewhat offended "It is too bad of you," he said "You want to be on the safe side and yet have the lion's share? That's not fair"

"Fair or not fair I must have two-thirds of the money," said Rames "And I am sure, if I choose to tell the lad's mother, she will not mind my having

whatever I like to ask for. They are in such distress that any sum, however small, will be most welcome to them "

" Oh, certainly," said Gadadhar " But really that letter has damped my spirits When last there came a registered letter, the postman, on delivering it to me, inquired what relation I was to the sender of it I said, ' I am his younger brother ' Now, just think of all I have done I have lied, I have forged, and it is hard that you who have done none of these things must have two-thirds of the money "

" True, you have lied and forged , but who put the idea into your head, I want to know," said Rames

" Not you, I will swear When I showed the first registered letter to my sister it was she who advised me to keep it and sign the receipt "

" But who advised you not to sign your own name but put Gopal's instead, so as to make the postman think that you were the identical person to whom the letter was addressed ? "

" It was you, I admit," said Gadadhar , " but if I had never consulted you, you would never have known anything about it "

" No , but it was very fortunate you consulted me, for if you had signed your own name, the police would have arrested you long ago "

" But for all that, you must admit that your demand is most unreasonable You see, if you have four hundred rupees out of six, I have only two hundred left And then there is half of it to go to my sister. Do you think I would have cared to run such a risk as that for a hundred rupees ? "

" I won't have anything," said Rames, rising and

pretending to be angry. "Let all the money, that you and I have got, be put together and made over to Gopal's mother."

"A very good idea," said Gadadhar, laughing. "But there is no hurry about that, I suppose Come, sit down, old boy, we must finish that bottle"

Rames sat down Now let us leave him and his most worthy friend and see what had been the fate of Bidhubhushan's registered letters. Bidhubhushan's intention was not to return home until he had earned enough money to make his family comfortable From time to time he had sent remittances to his wife, and he naturally thought that they had reached her all right when he saw what he believed to be his own boy's signature on the receipt. He thought it possible that his boy had not yet learnt how to write a letter, though he might have been taught to write his own name To this rather than anything else he ascribed his wife's silence

Bidhubhushan's first registered letter fell into Gadadhar's hands. This worthy gentleman broke it open, and, on finding currency notes in it, went to his sister, who advised him to keep the letter and sign the receipt. Gadadhar came away, thinking he would sign his own name, but on meeting Rames, who had just come to pay a visit, he took him aside to consult him on the matter. Rames showed how very foolish it would be to sign his own name, and advised him to put Gopal's instead.

Rames often bragged of his shrewdness as a police officer. And well he might do so; for though, after the commission of the above mentioned crime he seemed to be on very intimate terms with Gadadhar, yet he was

shrewd enough to talk very guardedly to him in company.

Every time a registered letter came from Bidhubhushan, Gadadhar intercepted it. "We are now living in that house," he said to the postman one day, pointing to Sasibhushan's new house, to which they had recently removed. As the office of the postmaster, who also had to do the duties of a pound-keeper, was within the confines of the police station, Rames, being on the lookout for a registered letter from Bidhubhushan, was sure to know when one came from him.

Hitherto Gadadhar and Rames had had equal shares of the misgotten money.

In his last letter Bidhubhushan had said that he was going to come home very soon. On receiving the letter in the morning, Gadadhar opened it at once, and, as he read it, his countenance fell and his hand trembled visibly. This naturally led the postman to suspect that the letter contained some bad news. So he asked Gadadhar, saying, "Who is this letter from, Gopal babu?"—"My father," replied Gadadhar.

"No bad news, I hope?" again asked the postman.

"No," said Gadadhar, without looking up.

Gadadhar quickly found Rames and showed him the letter. When Rames had seen it, like the scoundrel he was, he seized the opportunity to work on Gadadhar's fears by threatening to betray him if he did not have two hundred rupees more.

Gadadhar was offended. "Pay you two hundred rupees!" he said. "Why, aren't you in it? You are as much concerned in this business as I am."

"Absurd! I never received any money."

"O Rames babu, what is this you say!" exclaimed

Gadadhar, in astonishment "Do you say you had no share of the money!"

"Have you any witness to prove it?"

"Witness? Witness, I I will swear in court that you had a half share of the money"

"You are the defendant Your evidence is worthless," said Rames, with the cool composure of a police officer

Gadadhar now began to feel like a lost man Rames had already had half of the stolen money, amounting to six hundred rupees And now he wanted another two hundred After many entreaties, however, Gadadhar got him to come down to one hundred

On leaving, Gadadhar had asked Rames to see him in the afternoon Rames had said, assuming a look of gravity, that he would try to come if he had leisure

After returning home, Gadadhar sent to Rames almost every hour requesting him to come as soon as he could Rames, however, never appeared till it was near dark Gadadhar had taken care to provide himself with a bottle of liquor for the entertainment of his friend He had sent for brandy, but, as Ramdhan had none, had got a bottle of rum instead

Now, as we have said, when Rames rose, pretending he was offended, Gadadhar persuaded him to sit down, saying that they must finish the bottle. Rames sat down, but refused to take a third glass when it was offered him, on the plea of his having much work to do, though, as he said, he might wait a little longer if Gadadhar would keep his word

Gadadhar wrapped his *poita* [1] round Rames's hands,

[1] The holy thread or badge of honour worn by Brahmans and other high caste Hindus

and in a tone of deep distress begged that he would not press him for the money, as his sister having got all there was, it would be very hard to get anything out of her Having thus made an appeal to his kindness he abruptly let go his hands and falling on his knees caught hold of his feet, crying convulsively like a child

"For shame, let go my feet, Gadadhar babu," said Rames, nothing moved by his tears "Remember, sir, I am a police officer, and there is no putting me off with such excuses as these Come, quit hold of my feet or I will tell all"

Gadadhar seemed to pay no heed to his words He still clung to his feet while his face was bathed in tears. "Are you so hard-hearted that nothing can move you?" he said after a little while "Oh, be not hard upon me!"

Rames was not one to be put off in that way But he said nothing, and Gadadhar, taking his silence as a sign of his being disposed to be kind quitted hold of his feet, and getting on his legs again, said, "I throw myself upon your mercy"

"Nonsense," said Rames "I want the cash—one hundred rupees"

"Why, you are the most cruel and hard-hearted man I have ever seen"

"Perhaps I am," said Rames. Gadadhar felt that it was useless to urge him any more, so telling his friend to wait, he stepped into the house

"The wretch!" said Rames to himself, "to live an altogether worthless life at the expense of his brother-in-law, and be always on the look-out for some mischief to be up to But I won't stop here I will see him go to jail Yes, prison will take all the merriment out of him."

In about half an hour Gadadhar returned.

"Well, what success?" inquired Rames.

"Didn't I tell you it was not easy to get anything out of her?"

"I don't want to listen to your nonsense I want to know if she has agreed to pay the money I cannot afford to wait any longer Do you know that you are robbing the police while you detain me here?"

"I know I have had great difficulty in persuading her to give the money She would not consent to pay more than fifty rupees, but by many entreaties I got her at last to comply with my request She has agreed to pay a hundred and one rupees, one rupee, you know, being the price of that bottle of rum"

"Go and bring the money then"

"Not to-day," said Gadadhar "You will have it to-morrow"

"That's no good. To speak the truth I tremble at the very thought of that letter I shouldn't at all wonder if you or both of us have to go to jail I, however, think I shall get off scot-free myself if I go and inform the police now, but I won't do that, because as a friend I do not wish to get you into any serious trouble But if it were not you I would not take less than five hundred rupees to hold my tongue about it And what are you to pay? Only a hundred rupees more And you talk of putting it off until to-morrow!"

Gadadhar made no answer, but rose as if mechanically, and went into the house. In an hour he returned with one hundred rupees, which he put into Rames's hand Having received the money Rames rose and left him in haste.

CHAPTER XXVII

BIDHUBHUSHAN RETURNS HOME

IT was a quiet but rather unpleasant evening about the middle of August For seven days in succession there had been continual rain, and now it was drizzling The road was covered with mud and filled with ruts containing dirty water. Let a wayfarer carelessly tread upon one of them and the water would shoot up as from a squirt and soil his clothes There was in the air a stench of decayed leaves where the trees were growing rather thick on the road-side The smoke of houses standing at a little distance was rising among the foliage Here and there light glimmered, and indicated the approach of dusk The mosquitoes and other insects were on the wing, and the croaking of the frogs was almost deafening There was not a stray sheep or cow to be seen, and very few men were stirring

At this time two travellers were moving slowly in the direction of Krishnagar. Each carried a small bag in his left hand, and in his right hand an umbrella to protect him from the rain They had no shoes on their feet, but they had shirts on, and their scarves were wrapped round their heads in the shape of a pugree They trudged on, one keeping before, and the other

just behind They had walked several miles and were tired, and particularly so was the one that walked behind, as could be seen by his weary gait Night overtook them as they entered a village "Let us stop here for to-night," said the one that walked before, to his companion These words were spoken in a low cautious tone as if the speaker was afraid of something The reader, of course, need not be told that the speaker is Nilkamal, and the person to whom these words were addressed is our friend, Bidhubhushan

Not receiving any answer, he said again, "It is not advisable, my friend, to travel in the night, and specially when the *Durga puja* festival is at hand, when one does not feel quite so safe on the road Come let us find a place where we can rest for to-night, for we can get up before daybreak to-morrow and be off"

"Why, Nilkamal," said Bidhu, "you were not afraid of anything before"

"No, but now I am worth something"

"We are near Hanskhali," said Bidhu, "and our village is only about two miles from there Let us go on I say, for depend on it, there is no fear of our being robbed on the road near Krishnagar"

"Let us go on then," said Nilkamal, rather reluctantly.

Bidhu took the lead, and Nilkamal followed with some hesitation. A little way on Bidhu said, pointing with his finger, "Do you remember that tree, Nilkamal? It was there I made your acquaintance"

"Ah, my friend, it reminds me of my days of trouble"

As they came to the tree, Bidhu said, "Let us rest here for a little time"

They sat down under the tree. "You sit just where

you sat before," said Nilkamal to Bidhu "I remember you got frightened at the sight of me"

Bidhu looked round and sighed Four years had passed since he had first sat in this lonely place, and felt like one cast adrift upon the world What a terrible time he had gone through since his separation from his brother! What a gay jolly fellow he had been when he lived with his brother, and when his brother was kind to him Since then he had experienced the brunt of life's battles He had been through troubles that had given a very different mould to his character.

Nilkamal got a *chillum* of tobacco ready "Take a smoke, my friend," he said, as he handed it to Bidhu When their legs were sufficiently rested, they got on their way again.

Picture to yourself a man, who has been away from home for four years and is about to be reunited with those who are dearest to him on earth His face is lighted up in joy as he hopes to find them all safe and sound Again it suddenly becomes overcast as he grows apprehensive lest any evil may have befallen them Bidhubhushan's heart leaped with joy as he approached his native village. But at the same moment he anxiously asked himself, "Is Sarala well? May be," he thought again, "she is dangerously ill May be——," but that thought he could not bear. When he came and stood before his own paternal house at last, he was struck by a sort of gloomy stillness reigning over it Four years ago it was full of noise, when there were more heads than could be conveniently accommodated in the house Now it looked so dark and gloomy that his mind misgave him cruelly He sank down on the ground. "Call, Nilkamal," he faltered "Who is

there?" Nilkamal cried, standing at the door and knocking No answer, and the stillness that prevailed seemed only the more striking "Oh, what means this silence, Nilkamal!" exclaimed Bidhu, as if he dared not give utterance to his worst suspicion. Nilkamal knocked and called again "Who is there?" inquired a voice from within It was the voice of Syama, who now walked up to the door and again inquired, "Who are you knocking at the door at this late hour of the night?"

"Come out and see," said Nilkamal Syama opened the door cautiously, and saw two persons, one sitting on the ground, and the other standing close by the door.

"All well, Syama?" inquired Bidhu, picking up courage

Syama instantly knew the speaker by his voice Struck with sudden surprise and emotion she cried, "Oh, master, is it you! where have you come from?"

"Hush! Tell me, are all well?" said Bidhu

Syama paused for a moment "Yes, we live, but where have you come from?" she said

"Oh, thank God!" said Bidhu, rising to his feet and drawing a long deep breath of relief "But why do you ask where I have come from? Did you not receive the letters I sent you?"

"Not a line from you since you went from here," said Syama. "And mistress, poor dear creature—she is almost reduced to the verge of death owing to her anxiety for you"

"And how is Gopal?"

"He is well Such a good dear!"

"Then let us go into the house"

"No, you must wait here while I go and prepare

her," said Syama "For if you go and see her without warning, the excitement may make her faint away."

"O Syama, is Sarala so very weak?"

"Too weak, indeed," said Syama. And she left them at the door and went in again.

Bidhubhushan felt a secret pleasure when he heard that Sarala's condition was due to her concern for him. Alas! how little he dreamed that her anxiety, eating into her vitals, had led her gradually to become a prey to consumption.

In about half an hour Syama returned. Bidhubhushan followed her in What happy moments were those to him! All the way, and up to the door of Sarala's bedroom he wore a smile on his face, but just as he entered the room he sank down as one struck by a heavy blow. Sarala was worn to a shadow. Yet she had found strength enough to sit up in bed when she was told of Bidhubhushan's return home "You have come, and I am so happy," she said, with a sweet smile.

"O Sarala," said Bidhu, his feelings giving a hoarseness to his voice, "it was the sweet dear thought of you that cheered me and helped me to bear up under all trials, it has been, as it were, the sustaining food of my existence during the long years of my absence from home But how worn out and altered you are! I had not the most distant thought of finding you reduced to this!"

Sarala smiled and said, "Now I shall soon recover." As she was tired of sitting up, Syama smoothed her pillow and helped her to lie down again, when she rearranged her hair, tying it in a knot

Next morning Sarala felt so refreshed and easy that

she was able to leave her bed, and Syama was simply overjoyed to see it She was convinced that nothing serious was the matter with her, and that she would soon recover "Why, you see, mistress, my prediction has come true," said Syama to Sarala

"What prediction, Syama?" asked Sarala, with a smile

"Why, I said you would be all right when master came home"

"You are so very good," said Sarala "Whatever you say seems to come true"

She had hardly said this when Syama made an excuse to leave the house For Syama never liked to hear herself praised.

In the night Bidhubhushan could hardly get any sleep because of the concern he felt for his wife, and it was not until morning that he fell asleep When he got out of bed it was late, and the sun was shining brightly, and Syama was busy getting things ready for use in the kitchen His joy knew no bounds when he found his wife up from bed, and looking so easy and cheerful. Though a frail ghost of her former self, indeed, Sarala moved with such ease and talked with such cheerfulness that there seemed to be no doubt that in a short time she would be herself again She offered to prepare the meal, but Syama would not listen to it for a moment, and said she would call in Granny Digambari

"Will she come?" said Sarala

"Of course she will," said Syama. And she said again, "What do we care now? What can't money buy?"

When Digambari knew that Bidhubhushan had come home, and was now worth something, she readily

came away with Syama, without waiting to be asked twice Seeing Sarala she said, "You are so reduced, Sarala, and you never let me hear a word of it!"

Sarala only smiled and said nothing.

Soon there was the rumour in the village that Bidhubhushan had come home with plenty of money Everyone now wanted to see him To him went his neighbours and his former associates. To him also came those who had never condescended to exchange a word with him in his days of want and privation Even Gadadharchandra was not behindhand In fact, everyone now seemed anxious to gain the friendship of the man for whom they had never cared before

The day passed in conversation, and at dusk Bidhubhushan rose to go to his wife

In the morning Sarala had found such strength that she fancied she was as well as ever The whole morning she was busy doing this, that, and the other thing; but afterwards she got tired, and soon felt such languor and relaxation of the limbs that she was obliged to take to her bed Syama now never attended to anything without keeping her eyes constantly upon Sarala, she immediately went to her and said, "What ails you now, dear mistress? Why have you lain down again?"

"I got no sleep last night, Syama I feel so drowsy now." And she turned upon her side and composed herself to sleep

After a time Syama went again to the bedside of Sarala She was sleeping, sleeping as peacefully as a child On her serene brow there was not a trace of anxiety Though she was so terribly reduced, and you could count her ribs with your finger, yet how sweet was the expression of her face in sleep There had been

plenty of rain and the air was quite cool, yet she perspired copiously Syama rubbed her hand clean, then stooping she gently felt her forehead. It was cold as ice Sarala started, and fearing that she might wake her, Syama left the room with a noiseless tread "The air is quite cool, and still she is covered with sweat!" said Syama to herself But she thought again that it might be due to her having been busy, and hoped she would feel refreshed after her sleep

Night approached, but Sarala slept on "She is still asleep?" Bidhubhushan asked Syama as he came in "Yes," said Syama Bidhubhushan looked rather concerned He walked up, and, sitting down by the bedside of Sarala, felt her forehead Oh, how cold it was Bidhubhushan was frightened "Sarala, Sarala," he called out in great concern

She opened her eyes "Who are you?" she said, looking strangely at Bidhubhushan As Bidhubhushan was about to speak, she said again, "Yes, yes, I know you. You have come to take my darling! But you shall not have him No, you shall not, but I shall come" And she shut her eyes again

Sarala was delirious. Bidhubhushan was alarmed "Sarala, Sarala," he now called a little louder, bending over her, and again feeling her skin, which felt like ice.

"Why do you disturb me so? I shall come, I shall come presently," she said, opening her eyes, only to shut them again the next moment

Bidhubhushan left the room, weeping "O Syama," he cried, hastily appearing before her, "Sarala is so very bad just now, and I am so afraid. Hasten to her, I must run for a doctor"

Syama at once bounded to the bedside of Sarala

"Oh, my sweet one!" she exclaimed, "my most loving mistress! what has made you so ill again? You looked so well this morning Open your eyes, won't you? Won't you talk to your own Syama?" But Sarala heard her not She lay perfectly still, as if wrapt in one of her sweet slumbers A faded flower Syama could not but notice the striking contrast between the sweet expression of her face and the wasted condition of her limbs Sitting down at the foot of the bed and weeping silently she gently rubbed her mistress's feet, holding them on her lap.

Gopal was not in He had gone to play with Bhuban, delighted to find his mother looking so much better after being ill so long As Bidhubhushan hastened for the doctor, he turned out of his way to go and inform Bhuban's mother of the state Sarala was in, and to ask her to keep Gopal at their house for that night.

In about an hour and a half Bidhubhushan returned with a doctor from a neighbouring village. He was known to be the best medical man for several miles round, and to have a kind heart On his arrival the doctor at once gave the patient a stimulant. Sitting down by Sarala's bedside he at once proceeded to acquaint himself with the particulars of her illness. This done he proceeded, watch in hand, to examine her pulse Next he set about the examination of her chest and sides, while Bidhubhushan was kept in dreadful suspense. "What do you think of her, sir?" he asked, when the doctor had done.

"She has a fatal disease," said the doctor, pausing a moment "Consumption. It cannot be cured, at least I have never yet seen it cured, and I have been practising these thirty years or so The patient seems

to have had this disease for four or five years. If she had had proper medical aid in time there might have been some chance of her living a year or two more, but that is a mere conjecture In consumption there is no knowing when death may happen Although she is so bad now, yet no one knows whether she may not live five or six months longer But, in her present state, it seems next door to impossible I am afraid she will not live out the night That she was so easy all the morning was due only to joy at your return home after such a long absence She might have lived a little longer if you had not come home now In a case of consumption such as this, the reaction, after any very great excitement, often hastens the end But even if she live out the night, it is certain she will not live long after it "

What Bidhubhushan heard was enough to lacerate his heart "Alas! I am the cause of her death," he exclaimed, bursting into tears

"Oh, this won't do," said the doctor "You must stop weeping, sir, or you must leave the room While there is life there is hope But if you don't keep quiet there will be no chance for her "

"Oh, I shall keep quiet, sir," he said, speaking in husky tones "I shall not weep any more, but the thought that she might have lived a little longer if I had never come home—oh, that's too much for me "

"That's a mere conjecture," said the doctor, taking his hand within his "But supposing it not to be a mere conjecture, isn't it too late? What good is it to regret what cannot be redressed?"

Bidhubhushan said no more, and the doctor sat watching the face of Sarala.

After a while her lips seemed to quiver. She seemed faintly to ask for a little water Syama held the glass to her lips, but the doctor took it from her hand. Putting it aside he made her take a second dose of the stimulant mixture in a little water "Very hot," she said, making a wry face

Slowly her consciousness returned Bidhubhushan could no longer restrain his feelings, and he exclaimed, weeping, "O Sarala, you have had a most unhappy life with me!"

Sarala was fully conscious now, as people on their death-bed sometimes are before they pass away "Why do you weep?" she said, looking up to Bidhubhushan's face

"Sarala, Sarala, you are going to leave us and the world for ever, and you ask why I am weeping!" exclaimed Bidhubhushan in the greatest agony of heart

A celestial calm rested on the face of Sarala, which even moved the doctor "My end is near," she said, "but it is not true that I have been unhappy A woman is happy if she has a kind husband and loving children In my husband and in my child I have been happy, as happy as one could wish to be I had such concern while you were away, but now that you have come home I shall die in peace"

'Don't talk like that, Sarala, oh don't, or my heart will break"

"In my last moments I have one request," said Sarala, seizing hold of Bidhubhushan's hand She turned her eyes to Syama, but her feelings choked her utterance Tears gushed from her eyes, and Syama now burst into loud sobbing. The doctor, unable to

keep back his tears, covered his eyes with his handkerchief

Bidhubhushan's hand was still held in Sarala's After some minutes' pause, and when she had got over her emotion, she said, "My last request is this—be very kind to Syama, and look upon her as though she were your own daughter."

"Syama is truly a daughter, nay, she is a mother to me," said Bidhubhushan, speaking vehemently "But for her care of us we shouldn't have been alive now If I fail in my duty to her, I am a vile ungrateful wretch, and the curse of Heaven will be upon me"

He had scarcely done speaking when Syama left the room

The doctor made efforts to regain his composure, and poured out another dose of the mixture. "I don't want it, it is of no use," said Sarala, turning her face a little away, as the doctor was about to make her take it

"Take it, Sarala, oh do," said Bidhubhushan. "It will do you good Your case is not too serious yet"

"I can feel I am going fast," she said "I should have been dead and gone long ago, but it was not to be until I had seen you, my dear husband, once again Let me see my child at my death"

Bidhubhushan looked significantly at the doctor, who said that her wishes should be complied with at once

In a moment Syama left the house and was gone She very soon returned, holding Gopal in her arms As she was about to set him down, "No," said Sarala, "let him remain as he is" Then taking Gopal's and Syama's hands in her own, she said, "Do you remember, Gopal, what you said a few days ago? You have a

true mother in Syama Be good to her. I am sure you will be as good as your word ". Turning to Syama she said, " To me you have been a kind mother, a gentle daughter, and a sweet nurse Nothing can repay your kindness But, O Syama, my child—my own Gopal I give to you , he is yours "

As she spoke her last words, her eyes quickly turned in her head The house was filled with loud and piercing wails. For a moment life flickered in her eyes and then they were closed in death for ever

CHAPTER XXVIII

MISCELLANEOUS TOPICS

STEP by step Sasibhushan had risen to the highest post in his master's gift He looked down from his exalted position and felt himself at the height of his glory. In his master's eye he was as trustworthy as he was intelligent. The master spent his time with his boon companions In fact, while he had his few hundreds a month to spend in drink and dressing, he cared not to trouble his head about anything

How true is the saying there is no unmixed good in the world Raised to the highest post, Sasibhushan made enemies around him Those under him, who had wished to see him in his present dignity and voted for him, now wanted to have him out of the way His predecessor was a very strict man During his incumbency no one would dare to give or take a bribe, the underlings were much in fear of the watchful eye of the *dewan*, and did not dare to neglect their legitimate duties or do them in a perfunctory way But was not Sasibhushan a fellow servant with them? Was it not more than probable that he would be very indulgent towards his subordinates to become the *dewan*? So indeed they thought and hoped But

when he did become head of the office, it made no difference to them He chose to be as strict as his predecessor had been Then it was that they became his enemies and wanted to be rid of him

Accordingly the subordinates met together one day to decide upon the best course of getting rid of the *dewan* Several plans were discussed and rejected At last Ramsundar, the cashier, said, "Let a manager be appointed, and then Sasi babu will find the place too hot for him That's what I think We can induce the old lady to apply for a manager on the express grounds that the estate is not managed as it should be, and that the master has lost his head by too much indulgence in drinking"

The suggestion was approved by all. There was, however, the head accountant, who did not quite relish this idea "I am afraid," he said, "if a manager be appointed, there will be very few chances of our making even what little we are now able to get"

This silenced them all But Ramsundar said, "You need have no fear on that score On the contrary we may hope to fare better under a manager Figures correct, and cash all right—that's all he would want to see He will not be half as particular as Sasibhushan is, you may depend on that."

He spoke with such an air of confidence that they all agreed to adopt the course he recommended, and so they dissolved the meeting and went home.

Bidhubhushan, as might be expected, took the death of his wife very much to heart. A gloom was cast on his features He avoided company and kept indoors. Sometimes he would shut himself up in his room and freely indulge in his grief. Syama never liked him to be

alone, and at times she would get Gopal to stay near his father But if he was out, she herself would sit near him and converse with him One day as Syama sat by, talking of this, that, and the other thing, Bidhubhushan said, " You received not one of the letters I sent you ?"

" No, not one," she said

" Then who received my registered letters ? "

" Gadadhar received some registered letters," said Syama

" What ! Gadadhar ? Who were they from ? "

" From his maternal uncle, at least he told us so."

" Oh, the scoundrel ! " exclaimed Bidhubhushan, rising abruptly and making towards the door " The rogue ! The ugly rascal has been intercepting my letters There is no doubt he has stolen my money " And on he rushed with a madman's fury Syama, unable to see how Gadadhar could intercept his letters, quickly hastened after him She called to him, entreating him to stop, but he would not listen to her, and was soon off.

Bidhubhushan went straight to the post office Seeing the postmaster, he questioned if he had had any registered letters to the address of one named Gopalchandra Chatterjee

" Yes," said the postmaster

" To whom were the letters delivered ? " demanded Bidhubhushan

" To the addressee, of course Do you want to look at his signature on the receipt ? "

" No, not just now, I am in haste But will you please order the postman to go with me and point out the man to whom he delivered the registered letters ? "

The postmaster ordered the postman to go with

Bidhubhushan After walking a little distance the postman turned in the direction of Sasibhushan's house "There is no doubt about it," said Bidhubhushan to himself And describing Gadadhar, he said, "You mean this fellow, do you ?"

"Indeed, sir, I do," said the postman.

"Well, you must know that the letters were not delivered to the addressee But you can go now, it is he undoubtedly, and there is no need to identify him," he said, stopping near the door of Sasibhushan's house

"He said he was the addressee, and I believed him I am quite innocent, sir" And the postman looked imploringly up to his face

"I hope you are, but you are not to make any noise about it" said Bidhubhushan "I tell you plainly if the fellow escapes it will go hard with you"

"I will not breathe a word about it, sir" And the postman made a respectful bow and left him

Bidhubhushan next saw the police sub-inspector and acquainted him with the particulars of the case "It is late now," said the police officer "Come to-morrow morning Then I will go with some of my men and do our duty"

'In the meantime what if the fellow should escape ?" said Bidhubhushan

"Well, to prevent that I will send up four constables to keep watch through the night" And calling Rames, he gave the order, adding that strictest silence was to be maintained in order to make sure of the culprit

"I will do as you command, sir," said Rames, as he moved to enter the names of four constables in the diary book He then sent them off on their errand after giving them the necessary instructions, and telling them that

they must manage very quietly. He next began to think whether he should warn Gadadhar of his danger. But he soon decided to leave him to his fate.

In the midst of his fancied security Gadadhar was as easy in mind as any one. For three or four days after Bidhubhushan's return home, however, he had lived in the greatest anxiety, but when a whole week had passed without even a whisper to show that there was anything in the wind, the fear of his nefarious crime being brought to light was dismissed altogether from his mind and he was again as merry as before It was to avoid suspicion that he had made a point of seeing Bidhubhushan

Throughout the night the constables had kept watch round Sasibhushan's house without any one of its inmates knowing anything Next morning as Sasibhushan was about to leave the house, noticing a constable loitering near his door he asked what he wanted

"You will be pleased to wait for a little time, sir," said the constable "Our babu will be here presently"

"Your babu! What's his business here?" said Sasibhushan, in some surprise

"The long and the short of it is that Gadadhar babu has been intercepting letters addressed to another person, and we have come to arrest him, sir"

Sasibhushan had heard that Gadadhar had received a registered letter, and this he at once recalled to his mind. As, however, it had never roused his suspicions, he had never troubled to ask any questions about it Now when he learned the truth he grew very indignant. Calling Gadadhar he said, as he gave him an angry look, "Bring me that registered letter from your uncle" Gadadhar faltered. He looked from him to the con-

stable, the sight of whom struck him with such terror that he withdrew immediately, and running into the house, at once made towards the back-door. His mother and sister, seeing him run, cried, "What's the matter, Gadadharchandra? What makes you run?" Gadadhar paid no heed to their words but ran quickly past them They at once hastened after him to see what was the matter Before they could come up with him, he reached the back-door. Opening it he was just about to run off when he was confronted by another constable He uttered a terrified scream and fled back in terror

"What's the matter, Gadadharchandra?" cried both mother and daughter at once

"Oh, it's all up with me," he cried, and fled precipitately to his sister's room. They quickly saw what was the matter In a little time they went to him. There was Gadadhar lying on his face on the floor and crying convulsively For a minute they stood looking on in silence, and then the mother said, "Be comforted, my son, believe me, no harm will come to you" But Gadadhar, crying, rolled about on the floor and refused comfort Just then Sasibhushan's voice was heard on the stairs "Where is that wretch?" he cried. Coming quickly to him, he said in a bitterly reproachful tone, "What's the good of weeping now? You richly deserve your fate That letter was from your uncle, wasn't it? You are done for, you have brought disgrace upon my house"

Pramada and her mother were quick to feel the sting of Sasibhushan's words The offence committed by Gadadhar was nothing in their eyes. But Sasibhushan, so they said, should certainly have spared the cruel

words he had just spoken. "I knew what would happen, Pramada," said the worthy mother "Yes I did That is why I hesitated to accept your offer to come and make my home with you Poor as we are I think we have as keen a sense of honour as any one has"

"Drop it, mother, drop it," said Pramada "It is your destiny, you couldn't avoid it"

"What is this nonsense!" cried Sasibhushan, looking at his wife. "I tell you what, if you really feel any concern for Gadadhar, get him to put on a girl's dress and let him pass for your sister. I must go and see if the sub-inspector has come Maybe he is waiting at this moment for me at the door So be quick, and don't waste time in talking nonsense"

On coming away Sasibhushan found the police officer waiting as he had expected

"You know on what errand we are here, sir?" said the sub-inspector "Gadadharchandra Chakravarti is a relation of yours and lives with you. We have come to arrest him on the grave charge of having intercepted some registered letters addressed to another person. Please bring him out or we must help ourselves"

"What! search the house!" said Sasibhushan.

"Of course, if you do not give him up peacefully, sir"

"How can you talk in this fashion, sir? You must remember that this is a respectable gentleman's house"

"Respectable or not respectable, that's none of our lookout, sir. We must do our duty"

"Well, you may search the house if you like, but what if you don't find him?"

The policeman looked inquiringly at Bidhubhushan. "I am sure he is within," said Bidhubhushan.

Sasibhushan flung an angry look at his brother Bidhubhushan cared nothing for it. They all entered the house together, searching the rooms and going all over the house, but in vain. At last Bidhubhushan said, "We are forgetting the kitchen"—"True, yes, we must examine that," said the police officer. "Let the women walk out before us one by one while we stand on one side" At first Sasibhushan objected, but the sub-inspector would on no account listen to him He was, therefore, obliged to call the women and bid them leave the kitchen one by one.

Out stepped Pramada first, then, following in her steps, came Gadadhar in the disguise of a female, and next their mother, who brought up the rear. Bidhubhushan knew Gadadhar at a glance, and slyly pointed to him with his finger The sub-inspector, taking the hint, at once asked Sasibhushan to tell the one, who walked in the middle, to stop

Sasibhushan would have said that the person in question was his sister-in-law, but Pramada's mother was beforehand with him Through fear she forgot herself and said, "She is my eldest daughter, Gadadhar-chandra."

"Arrest him," cried the sub-inspector Gadadhar uttered a scream of horror and ran into the nearest room.

The constables quickly followed him in and secured him.

In due course Gadadhar went from the police station to the Magistrate's court, and thence to the Sessions, where he was convicted and got fourteen years. He was then sent as a convict to the Andamans

Though Gadadhar was punished, his punishment gave Bidhubhushan no pleasure. Indeed, he felt rather

sorry to think of his fate After the death of his wife, his own paternal house had a dull and dreary aspect for him He no longer wished to live in it He often smarted with the recollection of the troubles Sarala had undergone in it Besides, his funds were nearly exhausted. So one day he got together his clothes and a few other requisites, packed them up in his canvas bag, and, accompanied by his orphan boy and the good faithful Syama, left again for Calcutta As they knew very few persons in Calcutta, he was not a little concerned for his boy and Syama He was, however, soon relieved of his anxiety Syama was employed as a servant in a gentleman's house, and here Gopal was placed in charge of the kitchen It was arranged that he should remain there and prosecute his studies as a free student in the Duff school As regards Bidhubhushan, after a few days' stay in Calcutta he left with a deputy collector for Dacca

CHAPTER XXIX

NILKAMAL'S RETURN HOME

NILKAMAL passed that night at Bidhubhushan's, and early next morning, before any one was stirring, he got up and left the house. On coming to the bazaar near Ramnagar, he bought a new suit of clothes Going on, and leaving the bazaar some way behind, he put on his new garments, and felt very proud as he eyed them almost at every step that he took. Walking leisurely he got home at about meal-time

His mother and brothers, knowing him at once by his voice, came running to meet him The mother wept aloud and the brothers shed tears, for their joy was most unexpected, as they had long despaired of ever seeing him again.

Now that he was at home again after so long an absence, Nilkamal cared for nothing but his own comfort At all costs he would have his meal ready before ten in the morning His brothers did not dare to contradict him, for was he not more clever than they? And he had been earning money all the time he had been living away from them.

After his meal Nilkamal would regularly go to a neighbour's, where he spent his idle hours in relating

events of his life abroad, in talking of the great city of Calcutta, of songs and plays and other stuff and nonsense. And he seemed indeed to live a most pleasant life, but he was destined soon to see the end of it

One day, as he was telling an amusing story, the children of the neighbourhood sitting all round and listening, he was startled by a neighbour asking what part he regularly took in a play

He had touched him at the most delicate point Observing his confusion another repeated the question.

Nilkamal felt very angry, but he said with as much composure as he could command, "There is no playing a part in a *panchali* "[1]

"Yes, but you were not all along in a *panchali* party," said the one who was the first to put the question "When you were in a *jatra* party whom had you to personate?"

Nilkamal could no longer control his passion "What business have you," he cried, "to make yourself a busybody in things that don't concern you?"

"Nilkamal was only fit for preparing *chillums* of tobacco," said one, greatly enjoying his ruffled temper.

"That's a relief," said Nilkamal to himself, taking it as a joke, and tried to pass off the matter with a laugh But just then another said, "Nilkamal played the part of *Hanuman*"

"Who told you that, you impudent meddler, who told you that, I want to know?" cried Nilkamal, in great exasperation When he had said that, he rose abruptly, and was about to leave when his ear was offended by cries of "*Hanuman*" from behind Turning fiercely round, he rushed forward to punish one of the offenders;

[1] *v* p 130

but, failing to catch him, he quickly got on to the road and turned homeward in great vexation But the boys, who could ill afford to miss such good fun, instantly followed and went on shouting "*Hanuman, Hanuman*" after him Even when Nilkamal got home they showed no tendency to disperse, but hung doggedly about as they continued to pour honey into his ear It was so trying Nilkamal raved, and gnashed his teeth and tore his hair, as one ready to run mad, to the great enjoyment of the boys "Why do you lose your temper, my son?" said his mother, when she had tried in vain to disperse them. "Let them call you *Hanuman* or anything they like. If you don't lose your temper they won't trouble you any more"

"Call me what, mother! Oh, must you too join those brats in driving me mad! But go on, I have nothing to say to you. I will not remain in this house" And Nilkamal hastened in in high dudgeon His mother hurried after him, saying that she meant no offence, and trying hard to pacify him, but he was deaf to all her entreaties, and, getting his few clothes into his canvas bag, went off, with the boys shouting "*Hanuman, Hanuman,*" after him till he had passed the boundary of the village and was fairly out of sight

When, on their return home, the brothers heard all from their mother, they went off at once in search of Nilkamal, but in vain They went forth again the next day, and when they were some ten or twelve miles from Ramnagar, they found on inquiry that a man, answering to his description, had indeed come there, but whither he was gone no one knew.

CHAPTER XXX

GOPAL AND HEMCHANDRA

HEMCHANDRA lived in a two-storied house in a rather narrow street in Calcutta In the upper story there was only one room, which was used as his bedroom On the ground floor, the room fronting the street, furnished with pictures, was his sitting-room, in one corner of which stood his reading table, with a shelf which held his books over it. Gopal lived near and attended the Duff school Somehow or other he had attracted the notice of Hemchandra, who watched him every day as he passed his door on his way to school Indeed, he was as regular as a clock, for Hemchandra generally got ready for school when he saw him pass by

One day Gopal was coming home It was drizzling, and he had no umbrella Holding his books, covered with his slate, upon his head, he walked home at a rather quick pace As he approached the house where Hemchandra lived, big drops of rain came down all of a sudden and he was obliged to run to it for shelter.

Hemchandra had come home a few minutes before Seeing him pass by his door every day, he had long desired to make his acquaintance. And now an oppor-

tunity offering unexpectedly, he invited him to come and sit in his room.

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Gopal, "let me wait, please, where I am."

Hemchandra, however, went up and pressed him to come in with him. "The rain will not stop for some time, and you will get tired of standing," he said.

Gopal could no longer refuse Following him in he very humbly took his seat on one end of the *chowki*,[1] while his feet, ill-protected from dirt with a pair of shoes much worn, rested on the floor.

"Come here and make yourself comfortable," said Hemchandra

Gopal looked hesitatingly at his feet. "I am quite at ease where I am, sir," he said

"I don't think so," he said "You cannot be quite comfortable there"

Gopal, who could hardly resist so much kindness, had at last to make the confession, humble as it might be, that his feet had dirt on them and that he was afraid he should spoil the clean covering of the *chowki*

Hemchandra at once ordered his servant to help Gopal to wash his feet. After that he very kindly took him by both hands and made him sit by him. In a little while he was pressing him to partake of some refreshments laid on a plate before him

"Excuse me, sir," said Gopal "I am not in the habit of eating anything at this time of day"

Hemchandra, however, would not hear him, and taking up the plate in his hand helped him very kindly.

Gopal ate rather reluctantly. The rain now poured in torrents, and it was pitch-dark. The street in front

[1] A large rectangular wooden seat.

of the house was flooded, and very few people were about.

"The rain will not stop for some time," said Gopal. "Let me go now, sir, if you please"

"What! go in the rain! That can't be"

"My clothes are wet and I want to change them," said Gopal, in default of a better excuse, for he felt rather ashamed to tell why he wanted to go

"Why, you can as well change them here" And Hemchandra ordered his servant to bring him quickly some of his own clothes.

"Excuse me, sir I really don't want them It is something else which obliges me to go now"

"Don't want them!" exclaimed Hemchandra, feeling his clothes. "Why, you are all wet"

"Do let me go now, sir," said Gopal, preparing to rise. But Hemchandra most lovingly held him to his seat, saying that he would on no account let him leave in the rain

"You are so very good," said Gopal "I wanted to make your acquaintance, because I thought you might kindly allow me the use of your books And now I am so glad I have got to know you It is quite a pleasure to sit by you and talk to you But really I cannot afford to wait any longer just now as I have some very urgent business to attend to."

"What urgent business can you have?" said Hemchandra, smiling kindly

"Oh, since you are pleased to be so very kind to me, sir, I think I must speak it I have to cook in a family in order to get my board and lodging" As Gopal said that, he hung down his head for shame.

Hemchandra, to divert his mind, said at once, "If

you wanted to make my acquaintance, why didn't you do so before?"

"I feared you would not speak to a fellow like me."

"Why?"

"Because—because you are a big man."

"But I am not very big, not more than an inch bigger than you, I suppose."

"Oh I didn't mean that," said Gopal, smiling

"Never mind what you meant," said Hemchandra, handing him the clothes which the servant had just then brought "Now, put these on, please," he said.

Gopal was obliged to put them on, and he was going to fold his own to take with him, but Hemchandra wished him to leave them, and requested him to call again on his way to school the next day He then ordered his servant to see him home, bidding him at the same time take an umbrella and a lantern to light him on the way

In the house where Gopal lived there was a boy who was called Kanai He was the eldest son of his master, and was about his own age When he saw Gopal enter, he cried in a bantering tone, "Hallo! my young friend, right glad you have come at last Oh, it seems you can't walk without a light"

"Please excuse me, Kanai babu, I was detained on account of the rain"

"You were detained on account of the rain!"

"Oh, stop, please, do, master will hear"

"Oh, you silly little fellow! Do you make any distinction between father and me! But he has heard you"

"I will not tolerate this," cried the master "I don't want a nabob cook Do they think they can do

as they like? Let them leave my house to-morrow. They won't do for us."

Syama had been waiting, having got everything ready for use in the kitchen "Where have you been so long?" she said to Gopal "You see how they scold us" Tears were in her eyes. She wept to think that the poor boy should have to submit to such humiliation as this.

"Oh, I was detained at that babu's, the same I told you about the other day He has a lot of books Coming home from school, as I approached the house where he lives, the rain came on and I ran to it for shelter The babu noticed me He came out to me, and very kindly invited me to come and sit in his room He made me put on these clothes, as mine were rather wet, and eat something, for he said that I must be hungry after school He would on no account let me leave in the rain, but I persuaded him at last, and he ordered his servant to see me home O, dear one, he is so very good I have never seen one of his years so good and gentle"

"God bless him," she said, brightening up "May he have a long and happy life!"

"Would you like to know his name?"

"What is it, dear?" said Syama

"I was eager to know it, but I thought it wouldn't be proper to ask him At last I opened a book, and there I found it But I thought the book might not belong to him So I opened another, and another again, and then I was satisfied Hemchandra Isn't it a pretty name?"

"What's in a name, dear, unless the bearer of it has good qualities?"

"O if you saw him you would see how very good he is. He has kindly promised me the use of his books"

"I would very much like to see him. Are there any women in the house?"

"No," said Gopal

Gopal then started cooking, and after a pause of a minute or two said, "Will you put some oil in the *handi*?"

"There is none, not a drop," said Syama

"Then can you not spare a little out of the oil for my own use?"

"There is not much left, just enough for your use to-night."

"But it is late, I will not read to-night"

Out of her wages Syama paid for oil for Gopal's use at night A quantity of it had often to be taken for use in cooking, or the master's wife would be sure to accuse them of stealing her mustard-oil

When food was ready, Gopal served it on several plates, which he carried up, one after the other, to the master, the mistress and the little Kanai babu He next got ready a plate of rice for Syama, and was just about to get another ready for himself when he heard the voice of the young master wanting him He hastened to obey his summons. "What's your pleasure, sir?" he humbly asked

"Oh, you are getting to be a nabob, I see," said the master, angrily. "Can't you wait upon us while we are eating? You won't do for us if you must have your own way"

The young master laughed. Gopal uttered not a word but stood by with sad downcast looks.

"You, nabob, bring me some more fish," said Kanai babu.

To pacify them Gopal had served out more than enough of the pulse and curry and other dishes, and all the fish, without keeping a bit either for himself or for Syama So he said, "There isn't any more"

"What! four paisas' worth of fish, and it's all gone!" said the master's wife

"You surprise us," said the young master "You must show us the dish for holding fish curry"

Gopal went back, and after getting what little curry he had put in the plate of rice for Syama, and what little was left for himself, quickly returned with the dish for the young master's inspection

"You have kept some of the fish for yourself, and you lie," he said, with great effrontery

His words greatly pained Gopal, and he said, "Then I must wait here, and you will be pleased to go with me and look for yourself when you have finished your meal."

"Oh, you insolent little rogue! you have learnt to give an answer!" said Kanai babu Gopal said no more After their meal was finished he went downstairs to Syama and said to her, "You take your food, I won't eat anything to-night"

"Why won't you dear?" asked Syama

The insulting words they had used to him had greatly wounded his feelings "Oh, I have no appetite," he only said

Syama, however, was quick to see what was the matter with him So leaving her food untouched she went to bed with a heavy heart

CHAPTER XXXI

GOPAL AND SYAMA TAKE UP THEIR ABODE WITH HEM.

AFTER Gopal had left, Hemchandra called to his old servant Ramkumar Ramkumar had grown old in his service, and he loved Hem well, for he had seen him born and attended on him and nursed him Living with him in Calcutta he filled, so to speak, the place of a guardian, taking good care of him and offering him wholesome advice. Nevertheless he regarded him as his master, and Hem liked him, and cared for him, as a good old servant

Ramkumar slowly entered, and took a seat

"You have seen the boy, Ramkumar?" said Hem

"Oh, the boy who was here? Yes"

"Well, what do you think of him?"

"What shall I say? I know nothing of him. But he seems a good and gentle boy."

"Oh, he is so gentle and modest And he is a lovely boy, isn't he, Ramkumar?"

"Handsome is that handsome does"

"O Ramkumar, you are always very cautious in your speech," said Hem, smiling



"And so you will be too, when you are an old man like me. But what's his name?"

"I didn't ask his name. Indeed he has such modest ways, and such bright intelligent eyes too. I must confess he has already won a place in my heart"

Ramkumar looked round him and up to the ceiling, and said nothing.

"The boy has a rather hard life, Ramkumar He has to cook in a family to stay in Calcutta and go to school Such delicate fingers he has! It appears to me that they once knew prosperity"

"I don't know, but there may be lots of such boys as he is in this great city of Calcutta"

Hem greatly felt for Gopal. He very much wished to have him near him, and he tried to lead Ramkumar on to make some suggestion, and was rather pained at his indifference

"Well, Ramkumar," he said again, "what would become of us if we were suddenly reduced to poverty?"

"Reduced to poverty! No, no, that will never be But if you can get learning, you will earn plenty of money, and then you will be able to live in a respectable style and do what is good and laudable"

Ramkumar still seemed not to see what Hem was driving at

"But fortune is fickle," rejoined Hem "To-day I am a rich man, to-morrow I may find myself a beggar. Well, if we, by some mischance, be suddenly reduced to poverty——"

"Tush! it is idle to talk like this," said Ramkumar, interrupting him with all the importance of an old and privileged servant.

At this point a servant entered and announced that

the meal was ready. Hem rose and followed him in Sitting down to supper he ate in a sort of gloomy silence while Ramkumar waited by as usual. He afterwards walked upstairs to go to bed. Ramkumar followed him in a little time. He slept in his young master's bed-room.

"Ah! Ramkumar," said Hem, chewing betel, "while we are in bed and are comfortable, that poor boy may still be up cooking! Oh, I really feel for him very much"

"Maybe he is born to do it," said Ramkumar "If every one were born to govern there would be none to obey."

"But I feel a great sympathy for him, and would so much like to have him here," said Hem, after a brief pause

"Well, if you are so eager to have him here, why not tell him so?"

"Father, I dare say, will not object to his staying here"

"Not at all Has he ever refused you anything?"

"Yes, father is very kind to me But do you think I ought to write to him about it?"

"I don't think it is necessary, but you can write if you wish"

His mind being set easy about it, Hem prepared to go to sleep Failing, however, to get any rest, he rose, lighted the lamp, and busied himself in writing a letter to his father.

Next morning after he had sat at his books for about half an hour, trying in vain to fix his attention on them, he sent to Gopal the hurried line, "Would you, please, come and see me now?" As in the mornings particu-

larly Gopal had very little time to spare, he sent back word that he would see him on his way to school.

On this particular day Gopal managed to finish the cooking very quickly, but after serving up the meal had to wait till the master and his amiable young son had finished eating. Then taking a few hasty mouthfuls himself he quickly got ready for school And he did not forget Hemchandra's clothes, but taking them with him neatly folded and nicely wrapped up in a broad sheet of paper, was off in a moment As he approached Hemchandra's lodgings, the blood rushed in his veins, and his eyes shone with a light that seemed to impart a peculiar charm to his face For a long time Hem had sat waiting and watching at the open window of his sitting-room Directly his eye caught sight of Gopal, he hastened to the door to receive him Grasping him warmly by the hand, he led him into the house and made him sit by him on the *chowki*

Gopal put down the clothes "What's this ?" said Hem "Oh, why have you given yourself the trouble ?" he said

"They were drying when your servant came to me"

"I sent him for *you*, not for the clothes," said Hem, a little abashed After a pause he said again, "I want to propose something to you"

"Let me know it, please"

"I am afraid to speak it," said Hem, smiling

"Do not say so It is very kind of you to talk thus to a fellow like me"

"Indeed, my dear sir, I do not know what you will think"

"Oh, please call me by my name, please say Gopal. You seem to forget that I am only a cook, sir"

"Well, let us make terms," said Hem, laughing "I will call you by your name, and you must promise me something in return"

"I shall be glad to do anything in my power, sir"

Hem was just about to speak out his mind, but he suddenly checked himself, smiled and said nothing Just then the servant, Hera, put the hookah in his hand When Hem had smoked, he handed the hookah to Gopal "Take a smoke, please," he said Gopal only put the hookah in its stand "Oh, I beg your pardon, I quite forgot you don't smoke," said Hem

There was a pause, during which Gopal's eyes were wandering among the books arranged in a neat row on the shelf "I should be so glad," said Hem, "to let you use my books; but it may not infrequently happen that we shall want the same books at one and the same time"

"I shall feel much obliged," said Gopal, "if you will kindly let me have only such books as you can well afford to spare for a time"

"I wish we could live together, as then you would at all times be welcome to use my books"

"It is very kind of you to say that," said Gopal. "Am I to understand——?"

"Speak it, please," said Hem, smiling kindly

"That you want another Brahman cook, sir?"

"Why, what could make you think that?" said Hem. "I wish you would live with me as a friend."

Gopal was too much moved to speak, and he only hung down his head. "What say you to that, my friend?" said Hem.

"I am not alone, sir," said Gopal, in a rather hoarse voice. "I have a dear friend, and we live together"

"A friend!" said Hem, with some surprise

"Oh, be not surprised, sir," said Gopal, in a sad tone "In our better days we had a maidservant named Syama. I have always been the object of her tender care and affection At one time when we fell into extreme want, it was her savings that kept us from starvation We can never repay her kindness My mother, when dying, commended me to her care Oh, she can never bear separation from me!"

A tear glistened in Hem's eye At this point Ram kumar entered, and Hem said to him, "It is just as I guessed" He told him what he had heard "Then it is all right," said Ramkumar. "If Syama be able to help in the house we may do without another maid-ser ant"

"I cannot, however, give you any assurance, sir," said Gopal

"Why, do you mean to say that your master loves you too well to let you go elsewhere?' said Hem.

"No, sir," said Gopal, hanging down his head "I was scolded for being a little late yesterday. And they used——"

"Used what?" said Hem

"No, sir, I must not——I ought not to speak ill of one whose salt I have eaten"

"Well, let that go," said Hem "Now tell me what your idea is"

"I must ask Syama, sir I cannot do anything without her."

"Very well When will you let me know?"

"I will see you again this evening, sir"

In the evening while Gopal was engaged in preparing the meal as usual, he told Syama all that Hem had been

saying and all that he had said to him Syama was deeply moved by what he told her. "We may go there, my love," she said, "but we do not know what the other persons are like What shall we do if they treat us with insolence? Nobody here knows anything about us But there, as you have told everything, we can never bear being looked down upon"

"He questioned me in such a way," said Gopal, "that I could not but tell him all."

"Oh, you have done nothing wrong," said Syama. "But what do you think about it all?"

"I think we should be very kindly treated there"

"Then let us go," said Syama, after a brief pause. "But we must tell the people here that we want to go elsewhere"

Gopal was simply overjoyed When he had finished cooking, he ran to tell his kind friend that they were going to come the next day

CHAPTER XXXII.

NAVANARI [1]

It was now the time of autumn, and there was joy in every countenance at the prospect of the approaching *Durga puja* [2] The bazaars were crowded with buyers, for all now were busy making their purchases. Fancy things were exposed for sale everywhere The school-boys joyfully looked forward to their holidays. Everything, indeed, looked gay, now that the great festival had come round

Living together, Hem and Gopal greatly grew in love and affection for each other Gopal looked upon Hem as his own elder brother, and the latter truly loved him with fraternal affection.

"You are going home?" Hem asked Gopal. "If not, I would wish you to go home with me"

"No, I am not," said Gopal, "and I should be so glad to go with you to your village"

Hem and Gopal had gone home for the holidays Svarnalata soon became greatly attached to Gopal She

[1] A book so called from the fact of its containing the lives of nine illustrious women

[2] The *Durga puja* festival is the chief festival of the Hindus of Bengal

called him brother With no one would she read so willingly as with him If it was the meaning of a word or anything she wanted to know, she would go and ask him and no one else. They were, indeed, as brother and sister.

"I hope you are not neglecting your lessons, Svarna?" said Hem, one day

"Why, no, brother I read every day"

"Well, I should like to see how you are doing Bring your book, Svarna, will you?"

Svarna ran and quickly returned with a book

"What is it?" said Hem, as she handed him the book"

"Navanari"

"Well, where do you wish me to begin?" said her brother

"Begin somewhere in the life of Sita, I like that best"

Hem ran his fingers over the leaves, and, turning to an interesting portion in the life of Sita, began to read. He read on, stopping at times only to say, "Do you understand, Svarna?"

"O brother," cried Svarna, after trying to follow him attentively for a while, "you read so fast I shall not read with you, I shall read with Gopal"

Hem laughed and said, "Then call your Gopal here"

No sooner were the words spoken than off flew Svarna.

Gopal was in the sitting-room She quickly appeared before him Taking hold of his hand, she said, "Come, get up, Gopal, my brother wants you."

"Why, Svarna?" said Gopal.

"Walk in and you will know"

Svarna fondly pulled him on by the hand, while

Gopal kept pace smiling Leading him into her brother's room, she made him sit near him.

"You want me ?" said Gopal.

"Yes; but why do you always sit outside, Gopal ? You ought to feel quite at home here"

Gopal blushed and said, "I was only in the sitting-room, there is company there"

"Well," said Hem, smiling, "Svarna doesn't like to read with me. She prefers your teaching"

Gopal commenced at once, as he sat beside Svarna, holding the book open in his hand, and explained, as he read from one stop to another, giving the explanation of such words as she was not likely to know After a while Svarna's eyes left the book and were fixed on the bright open face of her young tutor Gopal looked up from the book and met the gaze of her soft dark eyes He coloured and murmured, "I hope I am clear enough, madam," and cast his eyes again on the open pages of the book

"Whom do you call madam ?" said Svarna, with a smile. "Why, what has come over you now, brother Gopal"

Gopal turned very red in the face. It was the first time that he had called her madam

Hem had been lying in bed and listening to his teaching He now rose to leave the room "Where are you going ?" said Gopal "Oh, wait a little, please, I shall be finished very soon"

"You go on teaching, I shall be back in a little time," said Hem, and left the room.

Gopal resumed his teaching, and continued to explain but not quite so freely as at first, and without raising his eyes from the book

"Why don't you hold up your head, brother Gopal? What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing, madam. Now let us finish this page," almost whispered Gopal

"'Madam' again! O Gopal, you are off your head."

Gopal looked at her for a moment "I am very poor, Svarna," he said, holding his head down. "I used to cook in a family I ought always to be very respectful in my behaviour" He looked at her again as he stopped A tear was in his eye And Svarna, in order to divert his mind, said, "You have no festivities at your house, brother Gopal?"

"No, we are very poor," he said And the tear that had started to his eye now fell on the open page over which he bent.

Neither spoke for a while, and then Svarna said, "You have a grandmamma, brother Gopal?"

"I have no grandmother, Svarna."

"Mother?"

"No mother"

Svarna's face became clouded in an instant. After a little pause she rather sadly asked, "Do you know anything about *my* mother?"

"Why?" said Gopal

"Oh, my playmates have all got their mothers; but grandmamma says it is not so with every child Whenever I ask father about my mother, I don't know how it is, but there is always a tear in his eye, and he kisses me and says 'Poor child!' and will not tell me anything."

"Svarna, your mother is dead"

"And yours too?"

"Yes, my mother also is dead"

"Oh, then we are both alike," said Svarna But the thought of his dead mother moved Gopal to tears He covered his face with his hands. He wept, the tears trickling between his fingers

Svarna looked on in silence for a while, and then she said, breaking into a smile, "Why do you weep, Gopal? I also have no mother, but I don't weep Come, dry your tears, and let us go and have a look at the idol. Do you have such fine idols as we have in your village?"

Gopal said nothing "Come on, be quick," said Svarna again "Oh, can't you walk, Gopal?"

Gopal now brushed away his tears and was ready in a moment to follow her

When they had come to the outer parts of the house, "Oh, stop, Svarna," he said, "I want to say something to you."

"Well, what, Gopal?" said Svarna, as she stopped

"Say nothing about my weeping, Svarna"

"Then you are not to talk of what I have been saying," she said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOPAL AND SVARNA FALL IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER

AFTER the talk they had had together Gopal and Svarnalata were no longer what they had been to each other Indeed they were smitten with a peculiar feeling which turned their thoughts into a new channel Gopal now kept away as much as possible from the inner parts of the house. He no longer liked to talk in company, and he often wanted to be alone Hem had come home after a year, and he spent much of his time in making visits and conversing with friends Yet he did not fail to see that Gopal was not looking quite so well as he used to do, and this he ascribed to his anxiety about his father's unaccountable silence Two or three days he caught him so absorbed in his thoughts that he was never conscious of his presence until he felt the touch of his hand, and then he turned with a start

One day Hem said to him, ' What ails you, Gopal ? You look much paler than you used to do "

" Oh, I have not heard from father for so long, I am uneasy at his silence "

" Don't be anxious, Gopal ; I dare say he is quite well. But have you written to him ? "

"No, I haven't"

"Oh, then write a letter."

Hem took out a piece of notepaper and commenced at once. Presently, however, he stopped. "You had better write yourself, Gopal," said he.

Gopal wrote the letter. In due course came the expected reply from his father. "Always rest easy about me, my son," he wrote to say, "and be very careful of your health and studies." And he also had made loving mention of Hem, expressing his deep sense of gratitude to the family.

Now about Svarna. She, too, was very unlike what she used to be. What was it that made her so? What it was Svarna herself knew not, yet she was keenly aware of it. Much as she wished to sit by the side of Gopal and talk to him, yet she felt she could not do so now. How she wished to fondly pull him by the hand again. Formerly, if she found her brother alone, she would be sure to inquire of him about Gopal. Now she dared not ask him. How quickly her heart beat when she but heard her brother's steps in the inner parts of the house, then she would go to see if any one was coming after him. And if there was no one, how disappointed she would feel. And yet when her brother was not alone, and following in his steps was the one on whom she could gaze and gaze for ever, she felt she was not her own mistress, and her eyes would at once be bent to the ground.

If accidentally their eyes met, both of them would look away. She now never called him brother Gopal, nor would she sit in the same room with him without a third person being near. If ever they chanced to be confronted with each other, how great was their shyness and confusion. Her books were just in the same place where

she had put them last, nor had they been meddled with since.

Svarnalata had now nothing to do with girls of her own age. She liked to be alone with her thoughts It seemed as though she had suddenly become a woman.

After the festivities were over, as one day Hem, being in his room, talked with Gopal, in stepped his father As he took his seat by them they hastened to move so as to keep a respectful distance from him. "Your school re opens soon?" said the old gentleman, looking at his son.

"Yes, father," said Hem

"Well," said Bipradas, speaking again after a little pause, "Svarna has attained a marriageable age We must find a suitable husband for her"

"Why, we must, but have you received any offer from any one, father?"

At this point of the conversation Gopal rose abruptly, his face greatly flushed. "You need not go, my young friend," said Bipradas, as Gopal prepared to leave the room

"He had better walk a little, father; he is rather dull to-day"

As Gopal left, Bipradas turned to his son again and said, "Yes, I have had offers from three or four persons, but not one of them is worth accepting. There is a young man living near Sreerampur He has scarcely any recommendation except his father's money. My best adviser, however, would have me pitch on him rather than any one else"

"Why, such alliances are by no means desirable, father"

"Quite so, my son I wanted to consult you, and I told him so in reply to his letter on the subject."

"But what do you think of the other offers that you have received, father?"

"Oh, not one of them is worth considering, as I have told you. I have rejected them all"

"What think you of Gopal, father?" Hem asked, rather hesitatingly

"Gopal? Oh, this boy you mean?"

"Yes, father"

Bipradas shut his eyes as if to consider, and then he said, "Yes, he is a good-looking boy, and seems very promising too But didn't you say that his father was without means?"

"What does it matter, father? Is not Svarna's portion quite as good as a fortune? And Gopal may be very prosperous in life, no one knows"

"No one knows of course And Gopal is also a high class Brahman Let me think over it Your suggestion seems good, my son If only his father had a competence, the match would be desirable in every way" When Bipradas had spoken these words, he rose and left the room in a thoughtful mood After a little while Hem also rose and went off to find Gopal.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOPAL MEETS SVARNALATA AGAIN.

Now after Gopal had left the father and son, he came away and turned mechanically towards the parlour As he was about to enter it, he met Svarnalata face to face Why had Svarna come there ?

In the morning, noticing her brother and Gopal talking together in the veranda adjoining the hall, she wondered where her father was Presently, however, she saw him pass through the hall to the veranda She flattered herself he would stay there for a time So coming quickly away she halted near the parlour; then creeping to the door on tiptoe, she peeped in There was no one inside In she stepped with a trembling heart. She thought she should be very careful not to make any noise, but everything, it seemed, wanted to be in the way For as she moved round a chair, she nearly upset it, and in trying to prevent it from falling she knocked a book out of its place, and down it came to the floor with a noise She quickly picked it up On the fly-leaf there was the name Gopalchandra Chatterjee. She sat down and contemplated the book for a while as though it had a peculiar interest for her Then, putting it back in its place on the table, she rose and drew

near the clothes-horse, on which hung Gopal's garments, the same that had been given to him by her father. She knew that Gopal put them on when he went to see the *vasan*[1] She carefully arranged the scarf, one end of which was on the ground Presently, however, she took it off the clothes-horse and put it on, and whispered as she eyed herself, "Thus did he put it on on the day of the *vasan*"

Scarcely had these words escaped her lips when she started at the sound of footsteps near the door And before she had time to get away Gopal was before her. "Svarna!" whispered Gopal, as though he could hardly speak for surprise In her sudden shame and confusion she dropped the scarf and hurried off as fast as she could. Gopal picked it up and putting it away rather carelessly on the clothes-horse, he threw himself on his bed "It is not for me," he thought to himself, "to aspire to the hand of Svarna What right have I to look so high? Svarna is a rich man's daughter, very clever and beautiful into the bargain But what makes her so eagerly sought in marriage is the fact that her father has willed a considerable sum of money in her name The old gentleman will not like to contract an alliance with one who is not his equal Would that my father had a competence But, better still, how I wish her father had not willed any money in her name Then I might have been able to get some one to try to conciliate her father for me But the will can be changed I don't care for her money Yet why should Svarna give up her portion? She cannot love a poor unfortunate fellow like me. Since she learnt that I was the son

[1] The immersion of an idol, after the performance of the usual ceremonies of worship, into a tank or river

of a very poor man, she has never come near me How I wish I had never seen her If she cannot love me, what's the good of my loving her? And who knows but when I am gone from here, I may never see her in my life again Away then with the thought of her"

He rose and took his seat at the table Opening his history he began to read It was, however, to no purpose, for when, after a while, he stopped to refresh his memory, he found that his reading had made no impression on his mind He put the book aside and took up his grammar, thinking he would try to do better this time, but he soon had to give up the attempt as altogether useless He next thought he would write a letter, and took out a piece of notepaper Putting in the date, he stopped to think to whom he should write He recollected a friend or two who really cared for him, but at last he made up his mind to write to his father. As he had put at the top the date in English, he clipped that side of the letter-paper and commenced at once in Bengali But he began so to blot and blunder that he saw it was no use going on, and flinging the pen aside and tearing up the letter he went and lay down in bed again

He had just lain down when Hem entered "Oh, you are here!" he cried "I have been seeking you Didn't you hear me call?"

"No," said Gopal, sitting up

"I called aloud," said Hem. "It is strange you didn't hear me But come," he said again, taking hold of Gopal's hand, "it is near meal-time, let us go and take our bath."

"When are we to go down to Calcutta?" asked Gopal

"Not settled yet"

"But what about——?" Gopal would have said "Svarna's marriage," but he checked himself As it happened Hem did not hear him, his thoughts being elsewhere at the time.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MEETING OF BIDHUBHUSHAN AND NILKAMAL

Leaving Gopal behind, Bidhubhushan, as the reader may remember, left Calcutta with a deputy collector for Dacca. This gentleman, after their arrival, gave Bidhubhushan a post under him in his court, and he began to live with him. At first, for want of experience, he had some difficulty in performing his duties, but by earnestness and constant application he soon succeeded in mastering his work The collector was very fond of music, and Bidhubhushan, having some proficiency in it, soon ingratiated himself with him. Out of his pay he occasionally made small remittances to his son, and he now seemed perfectly content with his lot and to have nothing to complain of.

One day as Bidhubhushan was sitting in a shop where he occasionally gave custom, he heard a sudden uproar very close to him in the street Quickly going out to see what it was about, he saw a tall blackish fellow coming on in a great flurry, while in his rear came a number of rude boisterous boys, throwing dust in showers and continually shouting "*Hanuman, Hanuman.*" He at once knew him to be his old friend, Nilkamal. Nilkamal looked very unlike his former self. He was much fallen

off in flesh, and wore very long hair on his head, and his beard, which had been allowed to grow, now reached down to his breast His eyes, which were naturally red, now looked much redder, and thus gave a wild look to his features At times, when his patience was quite exhausted, he turned fiercely round upon the boys as though he would fall on them and pull them to pieces, or made a violent rush at them, gnashing his teeth and cursing furiously But the boys were always too quick for him, and when they fell back a few paces or dispersed as occasion required, it was only to return to the charge with redoubled force As Bidhubhushan walked up to him, he raised his hand to strike him. But presently recognising him, he cried, " Oh, it is you! I beg your pardon, dear friend; but do deliver me from these little devils, oh, do, I beseech you "

" Why, what's the matter, Nilkamal?" said Bidhubhushan " How came you to be here?"

But the boys were continually shouting " *Hanuman, Hanuman,*" and Nilkamal again begged and entreated him to drive them away Bidhubhushan did all he could to disperse the boys, but in vain At length, as the only alternative left, he led Nilkamal into the shop. The boys, after hovering about for a while, left the place and quickly disappeared.

When all was quiet, Nilkamal turned to Bidhubhushan and said, " What brought you here, friend?"

" That is just what I have been asking you Why didn't you return to your appointment? You were pretty well off "

" Why didn't I? Ask my fate. O my friend, there is no peace for me in this world Wherever I go I must, it seems, be made a butt of by men and boys. I had to

leave Ramnagar too soon, for there too the boys were after me, making fun of me and nearly driving me mad It is all, I think, owing to that wretched song, but you know I have long given up singing it."

"I am glad you have, but why do you lose your temper, my friend? That's your weak point"

"I know it is, but I can't help it. Why, the mention of that horrid name is enough to make me forget myself."

"You mustn't mind it, my friend. But you look much paler than you used to do."

"Oh, I am weary of such a miserable life as this."

Bidhubhushan tried to comfort him as well as he could and talked with him till night, when he said, "Will you come with me to our lodgings, Nilkamal? You are welcome to eat and sleep there"

"For three days," said Nilkamal, "I have had nothing to eat, nor do I want to eat anything now. My appetite has altogether left me"

Bidhubhushan was touched with compassion to hear him talk thus "Wait here, Nilkamal," he said, "while I go and fetch something for you to eat"

"No, no," said Nilkamal in a resolute tone "I won't eat anything" As he spoke these words, his face, as Bidhubhushan could see in the moonlight, assumed a terrible look, his eyes glowing like two coals of fire.

"Come, don't fret about it, my friend. You mustn't take it too seriously to heart"

"I think I will go with you," said Nilkamal, suddenly springing to his feet Bidhubhushan talked to him very kindly on the way and, when he had got to his lodgings, he made him sit in a room while he went to

fetch something for him to eat When he returned, Nilkamal was gone. He hastened out into the street to look for him, but in vain

Now let us turn to Sasibhushan. The *amlas*,[1] who all along had wanted to get him out of the way, had induced the old lady to apply for a manager. The Magistrate of the district, to whom the application was made, had come on inspection in person

When this important functionary arrived, according to a previous intimation given and received, he was shown into the office where the master, contrary to his wont, was seated near the *amlas* at their work He sat on a fine soft bed made on the carpeted floor, with his back lazily resting against a bolster Hard by stood a table on which were a few fine showy things He was, as usual, not in a sober state He looked very red in the nose, his eyes were bloodshot, and he could hardly speak with any distinctness He had a fan in his hand, which he waved to and fro to keep off the flies, which nevertheless returned again and again, and flew round his head with a buzz The magistrate viewed him with feelings of great disgust He, however, put two or three questions to him to which he could give no answers save those which were put into his mouth by Sasibhushan The magistrate saw at once how things really stood His order, on leaving, was that until the Government found an able man to appoint as manager, the business should be suspended, and that Sasibhushan should render the past ten years' accounts in proof of the manner in which he had discharged the duties of his office as *dewan* The order quite staggered Sasibhushan Indeed, he felt like one who was going to be put on his trial for a very grave offence. If he had got his dismissal instead,

[1] Officers in the employment of a zamindar.

how happy he would have felt! This day when he rose to leave, the *amlas* did not show their respect by rising from their seats as usual Indeed they sat fast, pretending that they were too busy. Even people who used to make salaam to him whenever they met him, seemed exceedingly strange this evening. All the way he walked, holding his head down; and when he got home he sank down on his bed dressed as he was, for he was greatly depressed.

"What news?" asked his wife, seeing him look so poorly

"I am a ruined man."

'You don't mean it; come, what did the sahib say?"

"Why, I am to render the past ten years' accounts, and that means my ruin, you know," was the short reply made by Sasibhushan.

Pramada would say no more, and left the room rather abruptly

After a while Sasibhushan rose and proceeded to his sitting-room. Here he waited, expecting the *amlas* would call, as usual, on their way home from the office. Night came on, yet no one appeared, and he grew very impatient At every approach of a footfall he flew to the door to see who was coming. But it was only either the goldsmith or the tailor or somebody else to whom he owed money.

He at last sent to the *amlas* He had word brought back that they were particularly engaged and consequently could not come. "Ah, I suspected as much," said Sasibhushan to himself. They could crush him at any moment. He felt that. It was near nine, and he rose and left his home. He went straight to

Ramsundar's, where he met with a very cold reception. The other officials were all there, but they no longer cared to treat him with respect. Ramsundar was smoking his hookah He used not to smoke in Sasibhushan's presence, but what did he care now ?

After having sat in silence for some minutes the *amlas* rose to leave. At this, Sasibhushan, who had been silent all the while, very meekly said, "I beg you will kindly wait for a little while, I am here to ask a favour of you."

"Of me!" said the head accountant, with a serio-comic expression of his face as Sasibhushan looked at him when he had made his request "Surely your honour is joking"

"Come away, sir," said one of them to the head accountant. "It is getting late."

"Oh, be so kind as to wait for a little time," said Sasibhushan. "I am here to ask a favour of you all"

The *amlas* resumed their seats "My prayer," said Sasibhushan, "is that you will be so kind as not to let me be ruined"

"For my part," said the correspondence clerk, "I have nothing to do with the whole affair. Properly speaking I have little or no concern in this matter"

"But may I not ask you," said Sasibhushan, looking at him, "to be so kind as to try to help me out of the very great difficulty I am in ?"

"Well, it seems he has no business with us," observed one of the officials. "Let us be off then."

Sasibhushan, with joined palms and tears in his eyes, said that his business was with all of them, and that, unless they took pity on him in his helpless position, he was a ruined man.

The *amlas* relented when they observed the humiliation of their chief After some discussion they agreed to let Sasibhushan go unscathed, but on the condition that he should pay them a thousand rupees each, and afterwards resign his situation.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"WHERE IS GOPAL?"

TROUBLES never come singly. Hem's father had died, and scarcely had the family ceased to mourn over his loss when a fresh trouble came upon them—Hem was stricken down with an attack of smallpox. In that year smallpox raged fearfully in Calcutta, and a great many people were carried off by the fell disease. It did not, it is said, spare even those who had before suffered from its attack.

On the third day of his fever Hem had the first appearance of smallpox on him.

"You have been vaccinated?" Hem asked Gopal.

"Yes," said Gopal.

"Still, you should be very careful," said he. "I fear I have got smallpox."

Gopal looked minutely What he saw very much alarmed him. There was a breaking out of small red pimples almost all over his body, which looked very suspicious. Without one word he left the room, and at once went off for the best European physician then practising in Calcutta. It was not long before he returned with the doctor, who, on seeing the patient, at once declared his case to be one of smallpox.

Within two or three days Hem's body was swollen all over His throat was so sore and painful that he could neither speak nor swallow any food without great difficulty.

Day and night Gopal knew no rest. He kept constantly by his friend's bedside, and would not leave him for a minute by himself to take his food or drink Sometimes he had his food served up in the sick-room.

"I cannot bear your constantly staying near me, lest you should catch it," said Hem to Gopal, speaking with great difficulty. Gopal said nothing

After a while he said again, "Have you sent home any intimation of my illness?"

"No," said Gopal.

"Say nothing about it."

"I have got two letters from home," said Gopal "Will you look at them, my friend?"

"No, you read them, and write a reply," said Hem

Gopal wrote in reply that things were all well with them

Two or three days afterwards Hem was delirious Night and day he lay raving in bed In his ravings he talked of Svarnalata and Gopal. Gopal was always by, and tears were often now in his eyes.

Syama attended on him regularly in her leisure time

"Did you ever know a case of smallpox like this cured?" Gopal asked Syama, with tearful eyes.

"Oh, I have seen much worse cases cured."

"Have you? O dear one, I am so afraid, you know."

"Don't be at all afraid. Depend on me, he will be well again."

Just as Syama had spoken these words, they heard a coach draw up at the door. "The doctor has come,"

almost cried Gopal. Syama hastened downstairs On opening the door she met the doctor just stepping out of the coach. In a minute he was by the bedside of the patient When he had examined him he asked, looking very serious, " How long has he been in this dull drowsy state ? "

" Since early morning," said Gopal, " he has not spoken a word " The doctor looked concerned.

" The case is very serious, sir ? " asked Gopal

" I am afraid it is," said the doctor, rather hesitatingly. This answer was too much for Gopal, and he burst into tears.

" Oh, don't weep, my friend," said the doctor, speaking very kindly " Nurse him well No one knows but his case may take a favourable turn It is not hopeless yet "

Lest there should be any omissions on his part, Gopal took note of everything that the doctor said to him

" We have not as yet sent any intimation of his illness," said Gopal to Syama, after the doctor had left. " We ought no longer to keep it from them at home."

" It certainly does seem unwise," said Syama " For, should the worst happen, God knows what they will think of us."

" You are right," said Gopal. And he at once wrote to Svarna the following note :

SVARNA,

Hem has smallpox He bade me say nothing about it or you would have heard from me before He is quite unconscious now and has been so since this morning.

The doctor says his case is not yet hopeless If you want to come, come at once Syama and I are doing everything we can for him

Yours affectionately,

GOPAL.

When Gopal had sent the note, he felt much relieved.

Svarna and her grandmother became exceedingly anxious when they heard the bad news. That very day they prepared to start for Calcutta; but as they had never been there before, and it would not be easy for them to find Hem's lodgings, Svarna's grandmother was rather concerned She, however, soon hit upon a plan. Their priest's native village was near Sreerampur She had more than once been to his house, and they would go there, and thence proceed to Calcutta with a proper person to take care of them on the way and see them safe to Hem's lodgings.

Their mind thus made up, they were borne in a palanquin to the railway-station, which was not far from the village. They took tickets for Sreerampur, and went by the first train, reaching their destination at midnight.

As soon as Sasankasekhar Smritigiri (for that was the priest's name) heard of the arrival of Svarna and her grandmother, he hastened to the door to welcome them. The old lady, as soon as she saw him fell on her knees before him and bowed down, reverently touching the ground at his feet with her forehead. Her example was quickly followed by Svarna When Svarna's grandmother had risen to her feet again, "O reverend sir," said she, "Hem is seriously ill To-night we must

reach Calcutta. As it will not be easy for us to find his lodgings, may I request you to order your servant to go with us?"

"I can take you there myself," said the priest "But what is his illness?"

"Smallpox," said Svarna's grandmother "O, sir, we are so afraid"

"Fear nothing," said he, "some *daivakarjya*,[1] however, is necessary, and the sooner it is begun the better"

"Oh, do anything that is necessary, and never mind the expense"

When she had said this, she took a fifty-rupee note from her purse and put it into his hand

It was dark and the priest knew nothing of its value just then. But when he had ascertained at the light the sum paid, which was certainly much greater than his most sanguine expectations, how very glad he was "Why, I am in luck to-day," said he to himself. But he was a man who understood his profession well So concealing his feelings as best as he could, he said, "You have made a liberal advance, though I do not think it will cover all expenses."

"Begin with it," said the old lady, "I will pay you more as soon as necessary."

"Well, but I was thinking how you could go to Calcutta to-night"

"Why, is there no train?"

"No," said the priest.

"Then please send at once to hire a boat. We must start to-night."

A man, accordingly, was sent off, but he returned

[1] The performance of a rite in which divine aid is sought.

after about an hour with the news that no boat could be got that night.

Svarna and her grandmother were, therefore, obliged to stay for that night at the priest's house. The next morning, before the sun was up, they were all ready to start. They were very soon joined by Sasankasekhar who, not for his devotion but for show, had charitably daubed himself with *gangamruttika*.[1] On his appearance, they bowed down as before holiness itself. He blessed them, saying, "May Durga grant you your prayer!" He then asked if Svarna had been vaccinated.

"No," said the old lady. "It is hereditarily prohibited in our family."

"Then I would have her stay here," said the priest. "Calcutta is not a fit place for her to live in now."

Svarna, however, refusing to be left behind, her grandmother said, "You are not to disobey the priest, child. What shall we do if you go down to Calcutta with us and have smallpox?"

Svarna made no answer. And the priest said, "Why, you can understand we ought to know best what is for your good. Now, stay here, my child, and you may trust me to keep you well supplied with news of your brother while you are here."

In the end Svarna was obliged to stay where she was, and Sasankasekhar quickly left for Calcutta with her grandmother.

On their arrival they found Hem lying unconscious in bed. The doctor had arrived two or three minutes before. How glad were all when, after seeing his patient,

[1] Mud of the holy river—Ganges.

the doctor declared for the first time that day that he was now fairly out of danger.

Soon after the doctor had left, Hem opened his eyes. " Where is Gopal ? " he asked

" Here I am, darling, what do you want now ? " said his grandmother

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SASANKA AND HIS NEIGHBOUR HARIDAS

LEAVING his attendant behind, Sasankasekhar left Calcutta that very day and reached home before dark. Almost as soon as he set foot in the house, Svarna came to him. "How is my brother?" she inquired, eagerly looking up into his face

"Oh, he is much better," said the priest. "I trust he will soon come round."

"When may I go down to Calcutta?" asked Svarna, much relieved of her anxiety.

"When your brother gets perfectly well You can understand why I object to your going there now But why, Svarna, aren't you comfortable here?"

"Oh, I am quite comfortable Only I think if my brother were with me now I could take good care of him"

"Depend on me, he is taken as good care of just now as one could wish There is a boy there named Gopal, who keeps by his side night and day. Indeed he is most diligent in his attentions to him I think he is the best and gentlest boy I have ever seen."

Svarna was supremely happy to hear Gopal so highly spoken of She said no more, and Sasanka retired to

rest for a little time. After that he came out, walked to the door, and, calling his servant, ordered him to fetch their neighbour, Haridas Mukerjee.

Haridas quickly appeared "Friend Haridas," said Sasanka, "I want to have a talk with you."

"What about?" asked Haridas.

"You will know presently, but we must be alone Come along with me, please" And the two strolled out together in the direction of the river. The sun had gone down, and, while in the western sky a flush still lingered, there was the moon peeping above the horizon in the east. It was the time of spring, and the sweet scent of wild flowers was in the air A little way down, the river made a sweet murmuring noise as on it flowed to join the distant sea It was indeed the most delightful time of evening, when there might be many pouring out their hearts in sweet communion with the Great Maker of the universe But let us hear what Sasanka and Haridas have to say to each other

Having reached the river-side they sat down on the grass "Come, make haste, it is night already, and I have my devotions to attend to," said Haridas

"Well, you mustn't be in a hurry," said Sasanka. "I am about to refer to a subject equally important to us both."

"I really don't know what you are speaking about"

"Well, then I must come to the point at once You know that Burdwan girl—the same to whom you were so anxious to marry your son?"

"Well, what about her? But go on"

"Bipradas, you know, was a very good fellow. You must remember what his reply was to the letter I wrote to him some months ago when he was living.

Why, his very words were, 'Since you recommend this young man there should be no objection' No doubt he had a great regard for me, but it must be said that he was a little too fond of his son."

"I know all that"

"Patience. Had his son not been in the way, he would have been glad to contract an alliance with you."

"That's nothing new."

"Patience is a very good thing, my friend. Well, Bipradas had several other offers, but he liked not one of them He was a man of the old school, and he cared more for money than for anything else in the world"

"Then why was not my son preferred? Though I am not rich, at least I have a competence."

"True; but, as I have told you, he was a most indulgent father, and never liked to oppose his own beloved son The son argued that as Svarna's portion was sufficient to make her comfortable in life, she should be given in marriage to a young man of promise, even though he be poor."

"My son is all that and more He is a B.A., and you must own he is handsome too."

"Well, if everyone saw with your eyes, your son would be the handsomest young man in the world"

Haridas looked up as if he was offended. "Don't take any offence, my friend," said Sasanka. "I do not mean to say that your son is ugly. On the contrary, I think he has every right to aspire to the hand of the daughter of my friend But——"

"But what?" said Haridas, seeing that he hesitated to speak out his mind

"I fear you will be offended with me if I say it."

"Why should I be offended? Speak, please."

"Well, if I must speak the truth, your son cannot hold a candle to the boy Hem would have his father pitch upon"

"You certainly disparage my son, who is a B A."

"If you saw the boy I speak of, you would not say so. I have seen the boy myself, and I consider him the gentlest and prettiest lad in teens I ever set eyes upon Such bright intelligent eyes he has! Indeed he is a very promising lad, and takes the greatest pleasure in learning"

"Then why should Bipradas not give his daughter in marriage to this best of boys in the world?"

"Why, haven't I told you that he was more a respecter of wealth than of person? And the boy's father is in the humblest of circumstances Yet, you know, Bipradas wanted time to consider, and would, if he had lived, have surely yielded to the wishes of his beloved son."

"The son is free to do as he likes now that the father is dead"

"Well, yes, but the boy has little or no chance now"

"Why?" said Haridas, looking eagerly up to the face of Sasanka.

"Now listen" And Sasanka drew himself up and looked his companion straight in the face. "Now listen," he repeated "Hem is confined to his bed by smallpox. The doctor says there is very little hope. Well, if his case proves fatal, about which there seems to be no doubt, why then this boy has not the least chance in the world For the old lady, poor Bipradas's mother, you know, does not wish to contract an alliance except with one who has got plenty of money"

"And do you think I have any chance in that case?"



"I believe I have a great influence with the old lady."

"Well, that's good, but the young man must die first"

"I will tell you what. He cannot live longer than three days at most So when he is gone, you may be quite sure of the girl and her money. For, believe me, I can easily conciliate the old lady."

"But a man may go as far as death's door and yet live"

"Well, if the young man should live, though there are a thousand chances to one against that——"

"Why, then I think we must put it out of our heads altogether," said Haridas, interrupting him

"Not so, I should know what to do in that case."

"What do you mean?" asked Haridas.

"I can secretly join their hands, and in such a clever way as you would never think of."

"How is that possible unless you can get the girl here, and in your own house too, which, I believe, would be a most difficult thing to do?"

"That is none of your look out If you rely on me, I promise you will have what you want"

"But the question is, how you can get the girl to your house."

Sasanka was capable of doing anything for money Haridas knew it well, but he knew also that he was full of cunning and deceit. He therefore said, "I must first see the girl, or I must wash my hands of it"

"Well, I will bring you to see the girl, but before I undertake this business I must know what you can pay."

"What do you want?" said Haridas.

"What do I want? Why, I am sure it is such a delicate affair that no one can pay enough for it"

"That may be true," said Haridas; "but I cannot pay more than a thousand rupees"

"You speak like a child," said Sasanka, laughing.

"Why?"

"What's that sum compared to her portion, pray?"

"What does it matter?" said Haridas "I haven't got it And there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, you know But I may tell you that it is not for her money that I am willing to have this girl for my daughter-in-law."

"Oh, certainly not. You are willing to accept her as your daughter-in-law because she is a poor little orphan, having neither beauty nor a friend to stand by her."

"Oh, no, no," said Haridas, laughing

"Why, I think I am not too dull to see your noble intention And you talk of paying me a thousand rupees because I am willing to act in the matter You *are* a noble-minded man!"

"Oh, you are facetious, but I was only joking," said Haridas, breaking again into a short laugh

"Then will you truly tell me what you can pay?"

"Truly, five thousand rupees. That is the utmost I can give"

"Oh, you are still joking, I can see"

"No, not joking. I am really in earnest Why, you know, there is not more than fifteen thousand rupees in the will; and then just think of the trouble and expense I should have to be at, for there is no avoiding a lawsuit to get this business done. The brother of the girl will never forgive our playing such a trick as this, but will be sure to go to law, and thus a portion of the

money, that will come to me by my son's marriage with the girl, will be frittered away in lawyers' bills Besides, a litigation means a hundred other things to pay for, you know. And what shall I have left after all this expense, if I pay you more than five thousand ? "

" And do you think the brother will spare me if he should get well ? Not he. He is a hot-tempered youth, very unlike your son, who is meek and gentle as a lamb ; and he cares not the least bit for me, though I am their priest He has adopted all the English customs, even in matters of food and drink. As for his English books, they have taught him nothing good If I need dread any one, I have most need to dread such a character as this. Yet if I have half the girl's portion in the will I will do the business for you, and I care not what may follow."

" Half the sum ! That's too much."

" Well, if you think so, let us say no more about it " And Sasanka rose as though he meant to be going

" Come, come, be reasonable," said Haridas, taking hold of his hand and making him sit down again.

" What I have asked is quite consistent with reason. I will not take less, you may depend on that. But if you cannot agree to my terms, why, we had better drop the matter for good and all."

" Well, well, I will consider and let you know to-morrow But what about the girl ? You must let me see her "

" You are welcome to have a look at her this evening if you like "

" This evening ? you don't mean it "

" I do though. Am I the man to joke ? "

Sasanka and Haridas went down to the water's edge to perform their evening devotions

Sasanka, who worshipped nothing but money, touched the water three or four times, and, having finished wonderfully quickly, rose, saying to Haridas, "Make haste, my friend"

Haridas was quickly ready for going home with Sasanka, and when he had seen the girl, he said to himself, "Why, she is quite in Sasanka's grasp"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SVARNA A PRISONER IN SASANKA'S HOUSE

Hem was now convalescent But he was not as yet able to leave his bed Day and night Gopal kept him company as before He was ever by his side to feed him with his own hand, to wipe his face, or to talk to him His company was as balm to Hemchandra, for whom it was impossible to love his friend more than he did now

Every morning, while Hem was confined to his bed, Sasanka would travel by train to Calcutta to see him, and return before dark the same day. For this Svarna's grandmother felt very very thankful How was it possible for the old lady to see through his garb of benevolence ?

As for Svarna, she could not be sufficiently thankful for it Was it a small kindness, as she thought, that rather than make any other arrangements, the priest should himself go and see him every day, which meant a journey of several miles, and not mind the trouble ? And each day, when it was near time for Sasanka to come home, she would go and wait at the door to look out for him , and when she saw him at a distance, she would run to meet him and inquire about her brother. Could any one have taken a more lively interest in their

affairs? Was not Sasanka the greatest of their well-wishers in the world? So indeed she thought him, and so she told him one day. The deep gratitude, which she felt towards him, and which she could not express without crying, was a reproach to his guilty mind. He could not look on her—a simple artless girl, but in contrast with his own hypocritical self Wretch as he was, he knew he was going to do her a great wrong, but it was only for a moment, and then, as he could never resist the temptation of gold, he laughed at his own weakness, as he called it, and, rising, proceeded to see his neighbour, Haridas

"What are you about? writing?" said he to Haridas, seeing him

"Oh, sit down, please. Only some accounts. Two minutes more and I have done"

"Well," observed Sasanka, "you have no time to lose You must be ready as quickly as you can"

"Oh, never fear, but you, I must say, are a little too hard upon me"

"Let me know once for all what you can pay," said Sasanka.

"Six thousand rupees"

"Well, I accept your offer, for really I don't like haggling The day after to-morrow, mind, is the day fixed for your son's marriage with the girl. So in the meantime be ready, and good-bye till we meet again on the wedding night."

Svarna was in quite good spirits. For was not her brother gradually recovering, and did she not have daily tidings of him? Why, she hoped that in a fortnight or so she would be allowed to go down to Calcutta to live with him. Oh, how cheering was the thought!

She was up quite fresh every morning, ate her food with relish, and seemed to greatly enjoy the company of the girls of the neighbourhood.. Such a sweet gentle girl! Little did she dream that Sasanka, whom she thought to be their greatest well-wisher in the world, was but a wolf in sheep's clothing, that he had been secretly negotiating with Haridas, and was so utterly depraved as to be prepared to do her an irreparable injury for money.

Night came on apace; and, according to his wont, Sasanka now left the house, and bent his steps towards the river-side to perform his evening devotions. Shortly afterwards his children fell asleep, with the exception of one, a sturdy boy, three or four years old, who rather capriciously took it into his head not to go to sleep without Svarna, and, whining and fretting, obliged his mother to call her. As Svarna appeared, "This naughty boy," said she, "has thoroughly made up his mind not to go to sleep without you, so will you stay here for a little while, my child?"

Svarna went to him, and the boy at once held his peace, and quickly fell asleep A cool gentle breeze was blowing, and sleep almost imperceptibly stole upon her.

On his return, at the usual hour, Sasanka went to his wife. "Who is there with the boy?" said he to her.

"Svarna," answered his wife

"Is she awake or asleep?" he said in a whisper

Svarna was wide awake now, for she woke up almost as soon as Sasanka set foot in the house. But she shut her eyes again and pretended to be asleep when she heard whispers near the door Sasanka's wife approached

the bed "Asleep," she whispered, stooping over her to make sure

"Then just come here to me," said Sasanka in an undertone.

As his wife returned to him, "Look here," said he, speaking as before, "do you see these two keys? The one belongs to the front entrance, and the other to the back door. Both these doors I have locked Now, you are to keep a sharp look out and see that no one tries to get out of the house by any other means"

"What do you mean? Why should any one not be allowed to get out of the house?" said his wife with some surprise

"That's none of your business"

"I must know or I will make a fuss"

"Well, well," said Sasanka, laughing defiantly, "I don't care at all if you do know it" Then in a cold, business-like way he acquainted his wife with the atrocious business he had taken in hand, which simply filled her with horror

"Why look like that?" said Sasanka again, eyeing his wife significantly "But I don't care a straw for your feelings. And, now mark me," he added, giving her a savage look, "if you should give the game away, I will——, but I need not say it" Sasanka walked off to the outer house

Svarna's feelings at what she overheard may be more easily conceived than described It was impossible for her to feign to be asleep any longer, so she gave the child by her side a pinch in the arm As he instantly woke up with a shrill outcry of pain, Svarna, as if disturbed in her sleep, moved, rubbed her eyes, and slowly raised herself up in bed. "You fell asleep, child?" said

Sasanka's wife "Yes, mother," said Svarna. And she rose and abruptly left the room. Coming away she at once ran to the back door. She found it locked She turned and ran to the front door. This was locked from outside. Oh, what should she do! Like a bird shut up in a cage, she fluttered and flew this way and that, but in vain She was a close prisoner in the house, and Sasanka was a monster who meant to eat her up. She could never have believed that he was such a fiend, but she could not doubt her own ears To her the house seemed to have the look of a dungeon, dark and dismal, whose very air was poisonous, and she longed to be out of it Full of horror she ran back to the room she had so recently left, and as she sank down on the floor she looked so ghastly that Sasanka's wife was greatly frightened "Why," she cried, "what's the matter with you, Svarna?"

It was impossible for her to suppress her feelings. "I have overheard every word," she cried, bursting into tears. "Oh! take my life. It is better to be dead than live to be miserable"

The soul of Sasanka's wife melted into pity She left her boy, whom she had put to sleep again, and went to Svarna "Don't weep, my child," she said, speaking very kindly; "I will contrive to free you from the clutches of my cruel husband"

"Will you? do you promise? Oh, be kind to me" And Svarna clung to her feet and wept piteously. Sasanka's wife drew her to her side, and wiped the tears from her eyes and spoke words of comfort to her And when Svarna was comforted a little, she said, "Can you write, my child?"

"A little," said Svarna.

"Are you able to write a letter?"

"Yes, but to whom am I to write? My brother is too weak to get out of bed yet"

"Is there no one else to whom you can write?"

Svarna blushed and hung down her head "I cannot think," she said.

"Why, what's the name of that boy? Yes, Gopal, I recollect it now. He is a clever lad, I am told Why not write to him?"

Deeper now was the blush on her face "I think I had better write to my brother," she murmured

"What's the good of writing to your brother? He cannot do anything, now that he is confined to his bed"

"No, but he will be sure to show my letter to Gopal"

"Well, then write to your brother" With this the good woman rose and left her She quickly reappeared with the writing materials, and Svarna commenced at once and soon finished her letter The next morning, almost the first thing Sasanka's wife did was to take the maidservant into her confidence, and, secretly handing her the letter, bade her put it in the post office on her way to the bazaar

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GOPAL TO THE RESCUE.

ALTHOUGH Svarna's letter was due to reach its destination before ten o'clock on the following morning, somehow or other it was delayed on the way and did not arrive until four o'clock in the evening Gopal took in the letter, and read Hemchandra's name on the cover Where did the letter come from? Those previously received from home were all written by the *gamasta*,[1] but this was in a different hand A female style of handwriting, but very neat and legible. Could it be Svarna's hand? He had never seen it before. But, if it was, wasn't she as clever as she was pretty?

"Here is a letter for you," said Gopal, going to Hemchandra Hem took it. "It is from Svarna, read it, Gopal," said he, handing back the letter.

Gopal opened the letter with a trembling heart. As he read it to himself his face grew red and his eyes flashed fire He never could have dreamed that Sasanka was capable of such baseness. Happily, Hemchandra's eyes were not on him, and he did not observe the visible signs of indignation in his face Gopal, however, made an effort to look unconcerned, and when Hem asked

[1] A collector of rents.

what she had written, he only said, as he put back the letter into its cover, "She has asked after you, and is very anxious to come here" Hem asked no more, but turned over on his side and quietly went to sleep. Gopal felt that he had no time to lose, and he quickly appeared before the old lady and communicated the contents of the letter to her. So great indeed was her indignation at what she heard that she cursed Sasanka and called him a rascal, and swore that he should rue his rascality Gopal begged her not to make any fuss, lest the excitement should prove too much for Hem and bring on his illness again. He said that, as it was past four, and the marriage was to take place at six o'clock in the evening, he must start at once if he was to be in time to prevent it He quickly dressed, and, stick in hand, boldly set off for the Howrah station to catch the 4-30 train He had scarcely gone fifty paces when it occurred to him that he had forgotten to take any money with him He went back at once "Quick, quick, let me have some money," said he, appearing before the old lady. She promptly opened her cash-box and handed him a twenty-rupee note. Without looking at it he thrust it into his breast-pocket, and, asking her to tell Hemchandra that he had left for Bhowanipur on urgent business, and might not be back till next day, set out again with all haste.

A little way on he met a hackney-carriage coming "Stop, stop," said he to the driver And as the man drove up and pulled up his horse, he jumped in. "To the steam-ferry, quick," he cried. "And I will pay you well if I catch the 4-30 train"

The horses were strong, and as the man lashed them furiously, they dashed along at a gallop. In a very short time the wharf was reached. Out Gopal jumped,

but when he found that the old lady had given him a twenty-rupee note, he was at a loss what to do He must have change, and he bustled up and down, for there was the steamer, that ferried passengers to the Howrah station, all ready to start. In the midst of his perplexity some one took him across the street to a man from whom change was to be procured "Give me change, quick," said he to the money-changer as he handed him the twenty-rupee note When he received it he paid five rupees to the driver, and dashed on in hot haste to the steamer. Just then the signal to start was given, and it was followed by a long loud whistle. He pressed forward with all the speed he could make. But when he got upon the jetty the steamer had started, and was noisily moving in her course with her full complement of passengers

There was not a minute to lose, and Gopal ran down to the ferry, and sprang on one of the boats lying there "It is a few minutes past four," said he, slipping a rupee into the ferryman's hand, "and I want to catch the 4-30 train. So look sharp, my friend."

"Sit there, sir," said the ferryman, "and I will row you across in the shortest possible time." Gopal was soon being rowed across, and quickly reached the Howrah side Just then the train gave a loud, sharp whistle Gopal landed in a trice. The ferryman asked to be paid, but he hurried on without paying any heed to his words The fellow, however, would not have it so, and quickly went and put himself before his way. "I have paid you already," impatiently cried Gopal. "I have only had my tip, sir," said the ferryman. Gopal, to get rid of him, paid him another rupee and ran to the station. He had just gained the platform when the

train started. Like a desperate man he sprang forward, opened the door of one of the compartments, and jumped in There was no time to get a ticket, but what did that matter ? He could pay the fare when he arrived at his destination

On entering the compartment, Gopal's head was in a whirl, there was a blur before his eyes, and he caught hold of the iron railing to prevent himself from falling For weeks together he had gone without his proper nourishment and his natural rest at night , and now the desperate effort made by him to catch the train was too much for him in his weakened state of body Soon he lay down on the bench There was a cool, gentle wind blowing, and, as the train moved on, he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

Never had he slept so soundly before And while he slept, numbers of passengers got in and out, till at length the train arrived at Burdwan at nine o'clock at night. Carriage-doors were being opened, and tickets were being collected It was all bustle and confusion at the station, yet still he slept At length a Eurasian railway-officer opened the door of the compartment in which he was Seeing that he was asleep, the ticket-collector pulled him gently by the leg, saying, " Get up, Babu, get up " Gopal got up with a start. " Is this Sreerampur ? " he asked

" You are dreaming," said the Eurasian officer. " This is Burdwan Give me your ticket, come on."

Gopal's head was again in a whirl, and his feelings seemed to choke his utterance

" Quick, give me your ticket ; why don't you move ? " said the railway-officer.

"I haven't got one, but I am ready to pay the fare," gasped out Gopal.

"I suspected as much," said he. "Come along with me to the station-master"

As the station-master was too busy, Gopal had to be shut up in a room for the night.

Oh, what a terrible night it was for him! "Must I," sighed he, "give up the thought of Svarna for good!" Though Gopal had said nothing to her, yet he had fondly cherished in his heart the hope that one day Svarna would be his own But that she was another's now and he must no more think of her—oh! he could not bear the thought "Why did I not communicate the contents of her letter to Hemchandra," he exclaimed, in an agony of grief "He might have been able to take prompt measures to frustrate Sasanka's design, and rescue Svarna from his hands. Oh, why did I fall asleep! How can I return home to him! How can I look him in the face again! He has been a most loving brother to me, but oh! how I have wronged him! By falling asleep I have allowed an irreparable injury to be done to Svarna, for which I can never forgive myself The dissembling wretch! The rascally Sasanka! But who ever thought him capable of such baseness as this! Hemchandra will be distracted with grief and rage when he hears it Svarna, at this moment, is no doubt blaming her brother, but, oh! she knows not that it is my unfortunate self that is to blame for it"

Thus sorrowing and lamenting he passed the night. "I shall be set free," said he to himself, "as soon as it is morning; but, alas! I have failed to free Svarna from the clutches of that scoundrel, Sasanka."

CHAPTER XL

SVARNA'S NARROW ESCAPE.

THERE are great goings-on in Haridas's house. The father of the bridegroom has procured a band from Calcutta. The yard of the outer house is full, the boys filling the greater part of it and making the very air ring with their mirth. The bridegroom, an ill-favoured youth of twenty-four, with a rough, dark exterior, has a rather repulsive look in his bright red wedding garment. He has a seat in the midst of a merry group, chiefly composed of students

Brides and bridegrooms have always the tenderest attentions paid to them on the day of their marriage The friends and relations of the bridegroom are most diligent in their attentions to him. Every one seems to feel proud of being talked to by the bridegroom, and every acquaintance is anxious to thrust himself upon his notice Those who have known him from a boy are as eager to see and talk to him now as those who are perfect strangers to him. The bridegroom has to be called away sometimes when his presence is required in the ladies' quarters; and, on every such occasion, he pretends to be very unwilling to leave the company of his friends.

"You are not to take any food to-day," said Sasanka to Svarna, calling her early in the morning

"Why?" said Svarna, looking as though she were unable to understand his meaning.

"Why? Because you are going to be married to-day," said Sasanka, breaking into a horrid laugh, which startled and frightened Svarna

Sasanka was a man of gigantic appearance, and Svarna now really began to feel she was in the hands of a giant, from whom there was no running away

"Yes, because you are going to be married to-day," repeated Sasanka; and he again laughed horridly

Svarna's fear at once changed to anger. Burning with indignation that quite drowned her sense of decency, she exclaimed, "Who is to marry me, and to whom am I to be married?"

"I am to marry you," said Sasanka, speaking very calmly, "though it would have been none of my concern had your father been living I need not tell you to whom you are going to be married, for you overheard every word of what I had lately been saying to my wife"

Svarna's surprise was as great as her indignation; for how could Sasanka, unless through some mysterious process, know that she only feigned to be asleep when he had a talk with his wife the other night? "What a good and kind protector you will be!" she, however, said in a bitterly sarcastic tone.

"I may be a bad man," said Sasanka, "but your father would have approved of this match, you may depend on that"

"My father! no, never. It is a lie."

"Well, never mind your father, since he is not

amongst the living. This match, you may know, has *my* approval and sanction"

"What does it signify whether it has *your* sanction or not?"

"Well, I am sure we could never arrange a more suitable match than this. The young man, I tell you, is worth his weight in gold."

"What care I what the young man is worth I will not have him. There is no compulsion in things of this kind"

"Well, this is a pretty state of affairs. I don't like girls that are self-willed. And what makes them so is often the little learning that they get, and that is so dangerous. Come now, you are to make no fuss, for I will not put up with any nonsense in such a serious affair as this." And Sasanka rose and prepared to leave the room. "Oh, stop," cried Svarna. "What right have you to hold me a prisoner here? Unlock the house-door and let me out, I say. I must go down to Calcutta"

"Well, there is no hurry about it. You can go after the marriage is over."

Svarna rushed to the door, exclaiming, "I will alarm the neighbourhood by crying 'murder'!" She was just about to rush out when Sasanka caught her by the hand and tried to pull her inside She struggled and pulled the opposite way; but she quickly had to yield to the giant strength of Sasanka, who, standing outside, easily locked the door as he pushed her from him Svarna screamed and wept and cried, but he only said, "Now, lie there, and cry your eyes out if you like" With this he quickly went out, and, going to Haridas's brought the drummers to his house. "Beat on your drums, my men," he called out to them, "and beat

harder whenever you hear any weeping and wailing in the house."

Svarna wept and entreated and threatened, but all to no purpose.

"Oh, have pity on me," she cried. "Do send me to my brother, and I promise you will have double the sum which you are getting for doing this great wrong. Nay, if you will not be satisfied with that, you shall have the whole of my portion in the will."

"You know not what you say," said Sasanka "You have not yet acquired the title to this money"

"But I say I will give you my portion, and I swear to this by all that is sacred"

"All these promises are of no avail. Sasankasekhar is not the man to trust in promises"

"What do you want then?"

"I want nothing but to see you smoothly through the ceremony, and then to have done with you altogether"

"You have a daughter, would you like to give her away in this way?"

"Why, it is very fine to hear you talk like this Let a girl into the mysteries of reading and writing, and you spoil her. That's proverbial."

Svarna was abashed, and said no more

Sasanka lived within easy distance of the railway station at Sreerampur. Svarna could hear the trains as they approached the station whistling and puffing, and she kept hoping that some one would come to her rescue And now she said as she heard a low distant noise, "Ah, there is a train coming. It must be from Howrah" And she brightened up at the thought that her rescue might be at hand. For about half an hour

she waited patiently, but after that she grew restless and flitted about the room like a caged bird Presently she stopped to listen There was another train coming Could it be from Howrah? It stopped It started again and went puffing past After a time there was another, and then another again, but no welcome messenger came from her brother. Then it seemed to her that the trains were all running to, and not one running from, Howrah.

Time wore on, and at last Svarnalata saw through an open window facing the west that the sun was about to go down The marriage was to take place at six o'clock in the evening What were her feelings when she thought of that dreadful hour being close at hand! By and by the sun went down, leaving a glow in the western sky, and Svarnalata expected that Sasanka would soon come to lead her to what she thought would be her death But it suddenly struck her that perhaps Sasanka had not told the truth when he said that her brother was gradually improving and would get perfectly well. Was her brother dangerously ill, or had the worst happened? Though she could scarcely think of the latter without a shudder, her mind now misgave her cruelly, and so great indeed was her suffering that for a time she quite forgot her own dangerous position

The shades of evening deepened A little cloud came over, sullying the clear light blue of the sky, a cool breeze blew, and the bridegroom and his party arrived Then it was all bustle and confusion. In the midst of the blowing of conchs, while the band played, the bridegroom was led into the reception-room in Sasanka's house The seat of honour in the middle was occupied by the bridegroom, while his friends and relatives sat

all round The young man was encumbered with a superfluous quantity of garlands, and had his forehead plentifully smeared with sandal-paste. The guests were all merry and talkative, and the boys were very jolly, and cracked jokes with the bridegroom. But where was Sasanka now ? He was busy counting the money of his bargain with Haridas

After a while, when Sasanka found it was all right, he rose and went to put the money under lock and key, then returning quickly, he joined Haridas, and they went together to the guests They were well pleased with each other, for everything was as it should be But time was getting on, and Sasanka proposed that he should go and bring the bride. "Yes, go and fetch the bride," cried several voices at once

Sasanka was off in a moment As he unlocked and opened the door, Svarna rushed forward and threw herself at his feet. Weeping, she said, "Oh, tell me truly how my brother is, or I shall not leave this room."

"Your brother is gradually recovering health," said Sasanka, "though he is too weak to leave his bed yet."

"For God's sake speak truly"

"I am telling you nothing but the truth Your brother will get perfectly well in time. He cannot get out of his bed yet. If he could, this marriage would never take place If the worst had happened, then I might have waited, and not be in such haste about this business" Svarna could see that there was some truth in the words which he spoke. So she only said, "Do not, I beseech you, sacrifice me to your greed of gold."

"Nonsense," cried Sasanka.

"Oh, spare me ! If you insist on marrying me to this

man's son, I will commit suicide, and you will have my death to reproach yourself with."

"What care I for what you may do after the marriage is over?" And Sasanka stooped, by main force, to compel Svarna to quit hold of his feet, which she held firmly in both hands. But all of a sudden Svarna let go his feet, and flitted to the farther corner of the room Getting the loose end of her cloth round her neck, and tying a noose with the greatest possible promptness she stood ready to draw it at a moment's notice "Stand where you are," she cried, "if you move a step I will take my life"

"Svarna," cried Sasanka, laughing as only a fiend could laugh, "I am quite sure of you, you cannot escape me."

"You need not be too sure of anything," said Svarna

"Wicked girl!" cried Sasanka, and advanced a step or two

"Stop or I will draw in the noose," exclaimed Svarna, in a determined tone of voice And she would have taken her life without doubt, had not Sasanka, at that instant, been startled at noticing a sudden blaze lighting up the sky in front of the open window, that made him rush to it in alarm And what were his surprise and confusion when, on looking out, he saw that his *chandimandap*[1] was on fire

[1] See page 118

CHAPTER XLI.

SASIBHUSHAN KNOWS HIS WIFE AS HE NEVER KNEW HER BEFORE.

On his return home from Ramsundar's, Sasibhushan told his wife what a cold reception he had met with there, how the *amlas* had slighted him, and how dearly he was to pay if he wished to be spared by them. When his wife had heard all, she shook her head, sighed and said nothing. She then rose, and was just about to leave the room when her husband said, "You are going, my love? Will you not give me a little of your company?"

"I shall be back soon," she said, and then went to seek the company of her precious mother.

What property Sasibhushan possessed was in his wife's name. The house he had built, the lands he had acquired, and such Government paper as he owned, were all in Pramada's name. Added to this, any loose cash he had was also in the safe custody of his wife Nothing could be better than Pramada's having her husband's property in her name. In this she was directed by prudence. While his property was in her name, Sasibhushan might be sure of its being as safe as it could possibly be. Far more secure than if he had had it in his own name, as then perhaps he would some day be in danger of losing

it, for who knew what might turn up any day? Formerly, when he lived jointly with his brother, he used to pay the rent of the whole of the landed property left them by their late father But, after his separation from his brother, he paid the rent only of his own half of the property Bidhubhushan was not able to pay the rent of his share He was in arrears with the zamindar, consequently his property was sold, and afterwards it was bought back by Sasibhushan in his wife's name

Ornaments rather than money were Pramada's aim "Money is quickly spent," Pramada would say to her husband, "but ornaments are a sort of provision in a house against any future pecuniary difficulty" She lso used to say that if any one was in trouble, which he could get out of by the payment of a certain sum of money, though he might have no money in hand, if his wife had a number of jewels, he need not lose heart Sasibhushan was ever ready to give Pramada credit for being the most prudent, if not the most peaceful, woman in the village

Now, as we have seen, when Pramada, after hearing all from her husband, left the room rather abruptly, Sasibhushan's mind misgave him, he knew not why The *amlas*[1] had agreed to spare him on condition that he paid them four thousand rupees and afterwards resigned his situation The bribe must be given Was Pramada unwilling to let him have the money? Could she possibly forsake him in his time of need? Sasibhushan could not brook such an idea "No, no," said he, "Pramada is certainly better than that Why, she cannot let her husband be ruined for ever"

Leaving her husband Pramada went downstairs to

[1] See page 210.

her mother "Is there any one by, mother?" she said in an undertone Her mother stepped out to look "No, my love, there is no one by," said she, returning to her daughter. "Then sit here," said Pramada to her, seating herself on the bedstead

Pramada's mother sat close beside her, as she eagerly whispered, "Well, what is it you wish to speak to me about, daughter?"

"Move on and don't lean on me, I say," said Pramada.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, dear, I didn't see," said her mother, as she hastened to move aside

"Why, it is quite easy to say that, but you have a pair of eyes in your head to see just as any one else has"

"I am very sorry, my love"

"Well, have you heard anything, mother?" said Pramada, softening her tone

"No, my love, I am sure I haven't"

"Why, do you mean to say that you live in the house with your ears stopped with cotton-wool?"

"How am I to know anything unless you tell me, dear?"

"Well, then I will tell you The sahib came the other day Do you hear, mother?"

"Sahib?"

"Yes, hold your tongue now. Well, my husband has to render the past ten years' accounts That means nothing more or less than his ruin, you know."

"His ruin! Oh, what shall we do then!" exclaimed Pramada's mother.

"Hush! if you cannot listen quietly to what I have to say, you must leave the room."

"Oh, I can listen, dear. Please excuse me"

Pramada forgave her mother, and said, resuming the subject, "Yes, his ruin He knows he has not been an honest man in the service of his master And he has unfortunately made enemies of the *amlas*, who are determined not to spare him. Such faithless rogues these fellows are. They would not hesitate to rob their master without pity, because you know, the master is a dead drunkard, and worse than useless The sahib of course will never spare my husband, as he is the headman. The punishment——why, it may be imprisonment, it may be worse—transportation."

"Transportation!"

"Yes, far over the sea to a place they call *pulipolou*,[1] from which there is no returning."

"Oh, pity! what will become of us! But is there no help, daughter?"

"Help? Yes, but there is no counting on that. The *amlas* can so contrive as to let him escape if he will pay them four thousand rupees in advance He tells me so, but I believe that's only to trick him out of the money, for there is no trusting these poor, pitiful, thievish rogues, you know."

The mother, who had lived all her life in poverty, and had never seen so much as fifty rupees together, looked puzzled at the mention of four thousand rupees. She had not the least idea of such a sum as that; so she dared not open her mouth.

"Well, mother, why do you keep quiet?" said Pramada.

"What did you say the sum was, dear?"

"Four thousand rupees"

[1] Colloquially, a convict settlement.

The mother looked hesitatingly up into her daughter's face. "Is that as much as two score or more?" she said.

"The devil take you! Are you a child?"

The mother was silenced

"Well," said Pramada again, "to pay four thousand rupees is to part with all my jewels, and the Government paper. Now, what do you think, mother?"

The poor woman was in a fix. She had to say something Yet she knew not what to say so as not to displease her daughter. She could not think of anything when Pramada said again, "Why, it is easy to see that this is only one of their tricks, but I am not going to be cheated out of any money in that way Yet if we stay here we cannot get out of paying the money. The only way of escape is to flee from here Let us, I say, take my jewels and all cash and the Government paper, and leave this place as early as possible. Why should I stay here and give up all I have if, by so doing, we cannot save him from ruin? Save him from ruin we cannot Why then lose my jewels and all and make beggars of myself and my children? And who will be a beggar, if he can help it?"

"Who, of course?" said Pramada's mother at last, now greatly relieved to know what her daughter would have. "Can there be anything more foolish than for any one to give up all that he is worth, and then go and beg from door to door?"

Having concluded that they must leave the house and not delay longer than they could help, Pramada rose and went back to her husband

"Where have you been, dear?" Sasibhushan asked his wife

"Oh, mother is unwell," said Pramada, ready with an excuse.

"Unwell? Well, but when will you let me have the money, dear?"

"Why," said Pramada, "I am sure there is no hurry about it You don't want it to-night"

"No, not to-night," said Sasibhushan, "but I must have it to-morrow."

Pramada said no more, and Sasibhushan dropped the matter for the nonce, thinking that he was sure of the money from his wife.

Next morning the cashier, Ramsundar, accompanied by two *peons*,[1] called at Sasibhushan's house. As soon as Sasibhushan heard of his arrival he hurried downstairs and gave him a friendly reception Then Ramsundar said, "Well, sir, a manager has come at last. You are to go with the *peons* there, for your presence is urgently required at the office Now go and bring the money, you understand me, and you have nothing to fear from us You must look sharp, sir, for there is no time to lose"

When Sasibhushan had heard him, he decided not to waste a minute, but left him immediately Appearing before his wife, "Now, dear," said he, "give me those papers and some of your jewels as an equivalent for a thousand rupees"

"What! now!" cried Pramada, as though it were quite unexpected

"Why, dear, it cannot possibly wait," said Sasibhushan

"Well," said Pramada, "four thousand rupees in itself is a fortune But what good do you expect from paying this money?"

[1] Messengers

"Good, dear! Why, only then I should not be sent off to prison"

"You think so," said Pramada, "but who knows you are not going to be sent off to prison? Who knows you are not going to be tricked out of your money?"

Sasibhushan looked up in astonishment "What is my money to me," said he, rather bitterly, "if I am going to be sent to gaol?"

"It may be nothing to you; but what I mean is that we are not going to beg from door to door if it can possibly be helped"

These words sent an arrow into Sasibhushan's heart "Why should you," said he, "beg from door to door? I have thirty bighas[1] of good rent-free land, yielding abundant crops of rice I have also other landed property And I have built this house which will not need repairs within some twenty years hence But come, why should we not hope for the best? Do please let me have the Government paper and some of your jewellery, and I can assure you things will be soon all right again"

Pramada neither moved nor spoke a word "Oh, come," said Sasibhushan again, speaking coaxingly, "be quick, love There is no time to lose. Now, get up, do, there is a good dear"

Pramada was still sullen Her husband got annoyed. "Get up, I say," he cried, "will you or will you not?"

"Why, how you storm!" said Pramada, taking advantage of her husband's somewhat ruffled mood "Do you mean to lay violent hands on me? Go to! I refuse to give you what you ask"

[1] A measure of land varying from half to three-quarters of an acre

"A thousand pardons, dear, ten thousand pardons. There is Ramsundar babu waiting for the money, and I am to go at once with the *peons* Oh, come, make haste, dear, and don't let us waste time, for I have not a moment to lose"

"Oh, you are a hard-hearted man," exclaimed Pramada, weeping "For some time your brother gave me endless trouble, and now *you* are determined not to let me alone. What a pity I can never enjoy one moment of my life. Why did my father know no better than to arrange my marriage with your father!" And Pramada covered her eyes with her hands and wept Sasibhushan only stood like one struck stupid "You never cared about making provision for me," she said again, weeping, "and now you are going for good."

"O Pramada," exclaimed Sasibhushan, in agony, "I should not—I must not go, only let me have the money But is it possible you are not willing to let me have it?"

Pramada only sobbed as though her heart would burst.

"Make haste, Sasi babu, we cannot afford to wait any longer," bawled Ramsundar babu from downstairs

"I am coming," cried Sasibhushan And falling on his knees before his wife, and weeping, he begged and entreated her to have pity on him.

At this Pramada uttered a shriek such as made her mother run to her "O father! O mother! why could you have brought me into this bad world! why could you have given me in marriage to such a heartless man!"

"Oh, dear, don't blame me," cried Pramada's mother "I was dead set against it, but your father would have his own way and not listen to me, and so you were married against your poor mother's will, dear. But my life has become a burden to me, and I have no desire to live any longer Oh, Gadadhar! Gadadhar! And do I still live without you, child!" And mother and daughter, mingling their tears, wept aloud as though they were resolved upon Sasibhushan's ruin

"What do you mean, Sasi babu?" cried Ramsundar babu again. "Do you mean to keep us standing in this way? We have waited over half an hour, and will not wait one minute more."

Sasibhushan now felt that he was a lost man. "Woman," he cried, in a tone of voice which showed that he was prepared for the worst, "I never had thought you could treat me in this way, but you are up to anything You poisoned my ears against my brother, and I was a fool indeed, as you often indirectly called me, to believe you. To think of all my brother had to suffer, because you would have him crushed and trampled under foot—oh! that is enough to break my heart Poor Sarala! she was so very good, but *you* have murdered her. And when it was all over with her, I felt that something dreadful was going to happen to me. You are a murderous woman, but I must suffer for my own folly. Can one cherish a viper in his breast and not be bitten by it?"

When he had spoken these words, for a moment he looked wildly round, and then abruptly left the room. Going to Ramsundar, he said, "I will go with you to the manager" And when he stood before him, to the great surprise of the *amlas*, he confessed his past

transgressions and said that he might do with him as he liked.

The manager was a deputy collector He felt some commiseration for Sasibhushan, but he had to do his duty. So he took a note of all his confessions The *amlas* and the cashier, Ramsundar, were all of them found more or less guilty; and they were ordered with Sasibhushan to the lockup The deputy collector next thought that as Sasibhushan's offence was very grave, his property should be sold to compensate the zamindar for his loss; and in view of this, lest any of his possessions should be removed, this cautious officer ordered the police to keep a strict watch at night over Sasibhushan's house.

Well, it was dark. The sub-inspector with a constable had just arrived. This constable was no other than Rames, with whom the reader is well acquainted Suddenly the sky became overcast, and immediately afterwards the wind rose, shaking the trees and making a howling noise. Soon, however, the storm abated, and was quickly followed by a downpour of rain. This in its turn did not last long, but still long enough to render the night air extremely cold It was not a very pleasant business to keep watch on such an evening, and the sub-inspector was not accustomed to such work, so after having been on duty for about an hour he began to feel rather cold and uncomfortable "Rames," he said, calling his assistant, "I am so dull and cold"

"I am always at your service, sir," said Rames. "You have only to tell me what you want done, and it is done."

"Well, then something to warm one would not be a bad thing, my friend."

Rames was off in an instant In a little time he returned with a bottle which the sub-inspector took from his hand. Then into the neck of it he put his finger, at the same time slanting the bottle so as to allow the liquor to flow to its mouth After wetting his finger, as he set the bottle by, he held it across the flame of his lighted bull's-eye The liquor, however, failed to catch the flame, which showed that it was not good. "The fellow Ramdhan," said he, "is not afraid to cheat a policeman!" As he was about to take a sip, someone cried, "Rames, Rames" Rames went off at once to find this person, and when he returned the sub-inspector had finished his drink "Here, Rames," said he, handing back the empty bottle, "another drop if you please, but take care, friend, you are not cheated again"

In short, when he had finished his second supply he began to dream of beds of down And he thought he would stretch himself on one of them when, overpowered by the influence of liquor, he measured his full length on the ground. When Rames saw that he was down and senseless, he quickly approached Sasibhushan's house, and walking up, knocked gently at the door. In a moment it was opened and Rames went in.

Pramada, according to a previous arrangement with Rames, had taken all her jewels and all her husband's cash, and was now waiting with her mother for that rogue of a policeman to come and lead them out of the house. "You are ready?" whispered Rames, as he entered "Yes," said Pramada's mother, in a whisper, "I will walk a little way with you to see you off," said Rames, speaking again in whispers. "Now then, follow me.'

Pramada had charge of her cash-box, while her mother had charge of a pretty large bundle of clothes Thus equipped they followed Rames out of the house

A little way on they stopped, and Pramada's mother paid Rames what he had been promised

Alone and in the darkness of night they made as quickly as possible in the direction of the river From the first, Pramada had made up her mind to go to her father's, and with this object in view had previously hired a boat So, on arriving, they found it ready waiting for them. In a minute they were seated in it, and in another they were on the way to their destination. But they were scarcely ten minutes on their way when a cloud overspread the sky, deepening the gloom of night. The wind rose again, and every now and then a flash of lightning was followed by the deep rumbling noise of thunder. But soon a deeper gloom prevailed, and the wind became furious The heavens looked as though they would come down and crush the earth with their tremendous weight Then came hail and rain together, and the fury of the wind now knew no bounds Trees were blown down and birds dropped dead into the river A shriek broke simultaneously from Pramada and her mother, and the next instant they were struggling amid the foaming waves The boatmen swam to the bank which was close Pramada's mother, supporting herself on her bundle of clothes, boldly pushed on to the bank till she too gained it in spite of the wind and waves As for Pramada, in one hand she firmly held her cash-box while with the other she swam as best as she could She had in this manner nearly reached the bank, but by this time so great was the cold and exhaustion that she could no longer hold the precious cash-box, which

slipped from her benumbed fingers and disappeared in the swirling water. Doubtless she, too, would have followed it had not a mighty wave, coming in the nick of time, borne her on to the river bank, where for the present let us leave her.

CHAPTER XLII

SASANKA'S DEATH

WHEN Sasankasekhar found his *chandimandap* in a blaze, for a minute he stood astounded, and then, as the force of the flames grew greater, he hurried out of the room and ran toward the fire On opening the door he had put the key near the window, and now in his agitation he had no thought of it or of Svarna When Sasanka had gone, Svarna looked out of the window and saw the blazing *chandimandap* At the same instant one of the thatched houses, that was nearest, caught the flame, and Svarna trembled as she saw it Then what a struggle there was to save life and property! What a great stir and tumult, and what clamorous crowds blocked up the pathway in front of the burning houses! Svarna now thought it was high time to make her escape Here was an opportunity such as she never had dreamed of, and she must on no account miss it She ran to the front entrance, but, perceiving a crowd there, she turned and ran to the back-door, here her foot slipped, and she fell down and hurt herself It was a struggle for life and liberty She utterly disregarded the pain, and right glad was she when she found the back-door open She darted out almost into the arms of a

crowd, but turning swiftly managed to avoid it Then on she pressed, no matter in what direction, her only care being to get as far away as she could from Sasanka's house It was not long before she came to where two paths lay before her, one to the right and the other to the left. Here for a moment she hesitated, and then turned to the left and went on She had not been running for five minutes when she felt the touch of a hand on her shoulder from behind She screamed, and redoubled her efforts Her fright, however, wore off when she found it was only a woman The woman laughed, walked up and spoke to her Then Svarna knew her to be Sasanka's maidservant Thinking she had been sent to chase and take her, she was again seized with fright "Oh, let me go or I will scream," cried Svarna, "I will not go back with you"

"Fear nothing," said Sasanka's maidservant "I haven't been sent to take you I have run away like you from the wicked Sasanka Look here," she added, showing her a cash-box, "I have stolen it from him"

Svarna had now no reason to disbelieve her. "Where are you going now?" she asked

"To my aunt's," said the maidservant.

"Where does your aunt live?"

"On the other side of the river I mean to stop there for to-night To-morrow I will go elsewhere I wish you would go with me"

Svarna readily agreed to her proposal They then struck into a by-path, and, after threading this and that narrow way for a time, they at length reached the river-side But they had to wait a long time before they could be carried over.

"I trust I am safe now," said Svarna as, after landing,

they walked on together. "Yes, you are safe," said the maidservant, "but I am not as safe as you are"

"I wish you had not robbed your master"

"Why, I have only served him right I wish I had cut his throat too Such a scoundrel he is! Was there ever a greater scoundrel in the world! He is hoarding up money by robbing other people And where is the sin in robbing a man whose business is to rob other people?"

"Well, but how did you steal the cash-box?"

"I know the chest in which he kept his cash. I often had looked for an opportunity to run away with his cash-box, but in vain This evening, when he entered your room, I saw him leave the key near the window I thought I would steal it, for I had often seen him open that chest with it Well, while he was in, I couldn't find courage enough to take it But when, on seeing his *chandimandap* on fire, he left the room in great haste, I said to myself, 'Now or never' So I went at once and got the key Then, opening the chest, and taking out the cash-box, which felt pretty heavy, I quickly made with it toward the back-door. Just then I saw you run to the front I had the key of the back-door, and so was able to get off in a moment Immediately after you found the back-door open and got off too. You were soon some way ahead, for more than once I had to skulk to avoid people hurrying in crowds in the direction of the fire And when at length I came up with you, I thought I would just surprise you; so I crept up and touched you lightly on the shoulder. But you were frightened, for you thought I had been sent on after you" And here the maidservant broke into a loud laugh.

"Indeed I thought you had been sent to pursue me," said Svarna.

They talked as they went on, and at last the maid-servant cried, "Do you see yonder hut? My aunt dwells there"

"How am I to go down to Calcutta? To-morrow I shall have to cross the river again to take train"

"You need have no concern about that. To-morrow morning we shall see what can be done for you"

As we have seen, Sasanka first noticed the fire from the room in which Svarnalata was In a room adjoining the *chandimandap* was a wooden seat, in the middle of which was a panel with a keyhole in it This, when unfastened, could be lifted like the lid of a box Into this repository, a little while before the fire broke out, Sasanka had put the money which he had received as the result of his bargain with Haridas. At first when he noticed the fire, his confusion was very great, but after a moment he ran towards it It was the month of February, and everything combustible was as dry as possible First somehow or other the adjoining room took fire Then the flames spread fast and set two or three adjacent houses on fire. There was a great rush of men, and loud was the uproar. Yet Haridas did not despair of his son's marriage He kept holding his son's hand and that of the priest, and, standing at a safe distance, hoped that the marriage might be accomplished when the fire had subsided

Now, when Sasanka came close to the flames, without a moment's delay he rushed into the room where he had left the money. Some bedding was on the couch, which he flung away with great violence. His money! Oh, his money! But where was the key? He fumbled

about his waist, but in vain. So he ran back into the house. There was everything where he had left it, but there was no key. Oh, how trying it was! In agony he struck his forehead with the palm of his hand and cried, "Oh, I am undone." He ran frantically about for an axe. At length he found one. In great haste he ran back to the room. He was just about to rush in again for his money when Haridas caught hold of his clothes. "Where is the bride?" he cried. "Why not go to a neighbour's and there have their hands joined?" Sasanka only lifted the axe over his head as he turned fiercely round. Haridas uttered a shriek and started back in horror. Sasanka then sprang upon the couch and struck it with his axe. It did not give way; so he struck blow upon blow, but in vain. The seat was made of sal wool, and did not seem likely to yield easily. Meanwhile the flames roared over his head. The mud walls might give way at any moment. He grew impatient and struck a blow once again with all his force. The shock made the whole *chandimandap* tremble, when, detached from the roof, down came a blazing beam upon his shoulder. Instantly he fell heavily upon his axe and received a deep cut in the breast. And while the blood gushed from the wound, the flame of the burning beam quickly set his clothes in a blaze. "Help, help," cried Sasanka, in a most piteous tone. "Oh! drag me out, men, and leave me not to perish in the flames." Not one, however, ventured to risk his own life to save him. Sasanka roared in agony. He was in too woeful a plight to help himself, and he repeatedly urged the men outside to save him. The mud walls threatened every moment to sink in, and no one was prepared to throw away his life in the effort to save

his. And suddenly, as the walls gave way, down came the blazing roof with a crash, and Sasanka was buried alive in the flames Thus ended his life

Haridas, who never had despaired of his son's marriage, now gave up all hopes of it, and returned home much vexed and greatly disappointed His son perhaps was not less disappointed, and he too, after lounging about for a time in company with some of his friends, was obliged at last to turn his steps homeward.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TRANSPORTATION OF RAMES

In the morning after the accident which happened to Pramada and her mother, intimation was sent to the police of the escape of two females from Sasibhushan's house, and of the sinking of the boat in which they set off. The head-constable, on receiving this intimation, went at once to Sasibhushan's house to confer with the police on duty He was greatly surprised when, on arriving, he found his superior officer insensible, and looking, as he lay on the bare ground, like one whose last moments were near. His breathing hard, his limbs stiff, and his eyes closed. What was the matter with him? The constable, Rames, knew nothing of it He was at his post at the back-door all night, and had found the sub-inspector in this state when he was relieved in the morning. Then, too, he had heard of the escape of two women from the house, and of the going down of their boat What on earth could be the matter with his superior officer? Could he have been bitten by a snake? The head-constable began to examine his feet very carefully. He, however, could detect nothing like a puncture made by the fangs of a snake Rames then stepped over to his head. "Why, I think his

breath has a smell of liquor," cried he, stooping low, so as to be very close to his mouth. The head-constable examined for himself. "Quite so," said he.

"I am a policeman, sir," said Rames.

"You are indeed a very clever fellow But what's to be done now? Try such means as may bring him back to his senses?"

"No, nothing of the kind, if you will take my advice"

"Why?" asked the head-constable

"Why? Because you see, should he never return to his senses, we may be hauled to court."

"What's your advice then?"

"I would rather have this matter brought to the notice of the deputy collector"

"That will do him material injury He will be degraded, or may even be dismissed"

"Can't help it," said Rames "As one sows, so one must reap."

"So one must reap, indeed," said something in Rames's heart. And as he thought of that, he straightway thought of his own transgressions, which filled him with the horror of detection

"Well, yes, we must take no responsibility on our shoulders," said the head-constable So without loss of time the matter was brought to the notice of the deputy collector And while preparations were being made to remove the senseless policeman in order to take him before that officer, a bottle was found near where he was lying Rames picked it up. "It gives out a smell of liquor," said he, smelling the bottle "Let me throw it away What shall we do with it?"

"Do with it! Why, how foolish of you to say that! Let me see if there is any liquor in it."

"There's none," said Rames, turning the bottle upside down But as he did so, a few blackish drops that were left flowed out and trickled to the ground

The head-constable was vexed "What did you do that for?" cried he. "Why did you let those drops fall to the ground. You are a policeman and you could be so foolish as to do that? Give me the bottle, I say."

Rames's hand shook visibly as he handed the bottle. "What makes you so nervous?" said the head-constable, eyeing him from head to foot.

"Oh," said Rames, moistening his lips with his tongue, "I feel shaky from having had to sit up all night." But his voice shook as he spoke, and the head-constable looked so as to let him plainly see that he was not at all satisfied with his explanation.

The sub-inspector being brought in, he was laid down before the deputy collector, and the head-constable put the bottle by. After inspection, this officer sent him in custody, and with him the bottle, to Krishnagar. He next appointed the head-constable to the task of investigating the other matter—the sinking of the boat in which the two women belonging to Sasibhushan's house had made an attempt to escape

Accordingly, the head-constable, accompanied by Rames and two or three others, proceeded to the quarter in which the boatmen lived. Then, with the boatmen whose boat had been hired, the police walked down to the river side. They got all the information they wanted out of them, and then they ordered them to fish up the things which the women had taken with them The boatmen were able to recover a few clothes, but nothing more For the cash-box they dived and dived long, but in vain And when with the assistance of more

men the boat was fished out, there was nothing found in it.

The head-constable next repaired to Sasibhushan's house to inquire as to how Pramada and her mother had succeeded in making their escape He first inquired of Rames. How was he to know ? He was at his post at the back-door, and he assured him that he never had left it for a minute The head-constable then saw Gadadhar's mother and said, " Who let you out of the house last night ? "

" Why, the man who kept watch over my son-in-law's house," said she

" His name ? "

" It is a pretty name I am sure Why, I mean the fellow who always pretended to be a very great friend of my son The wretch tricked Gadadhar out of his money, and then had him sent off to *pulipolou* "

" Well, if you don't remember his name, you can point him out ? "

" Of course I can "

" Well, madam, how did this man trick your son out of his money ? "

" O, friend policeman, in an evil hour did Gadadhar make friendship with this rogue of a constable Every one knew how very simple my boy was Would he ever have thought of intercepting any registered letters if that fellow had not put it into his head ? At first the rogue had more than half of the misgotten money But when after a time the matter came to be inquired into, he demanded of my son a hundred rupees more, and threatened to betray him into the hands of the police if he refused to pay it I was so afraid for my son , for where was a poor woman like myself to get that sum of

money? I am not, like my daughter, a rich man wife, you know However, I had some ornamer and I said to my daughter, 'Here, Pramada, keep th. ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees.' Pram. is such a dear, you know. To oblige her mother she the ornaments and let me have a hundred rupees to g to that fellow. And how did he repay it?" Pramad mother was about to say how, when, seeing Ram coming, she exclaimed, "Now, there comes the fellov Rames had been off on some errand, and, as he ca and stood by the side of the head-constable, she spo to him, saying, "Constable, you, what's your nam Indeed it was very bad of you to give up my son af you had had nearly all the money"

"Who had had nearly all the money?" asked t head-constable.

Pramada's mother pointed to Rames

"Who? What?" said Rames, pretending not o understand her.

"Why, weren't you at the bottom of that dirty affair?" said Pramada's mother.

"What dirty affair? I really don't understand what you mean, madam."

"Don't you, constable? I mean the interceptio of the registered letters in which you were implicated

"I implicated in that dirty business! You a mistaken, I must say."

"Impossible," said Pramada's mother. "Why, constable, it is not the first time I've seen you. You use to call frequently at our house, and you were ve intimate with my son. But such roguery as you we guilty of! Do I not know that you last got a hundre rupees from my son? And only last night you got